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MADAME DE MALGUET:

A TALE OF 1820.

VOL. III.

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MADAME DE MALGUET.

CHAPTER I.

MERRICK'S mysterious visitant remained for awhile as much absorbed in the sorrow she apparently attempted in vain to repress, as was Merrick himself by the contemplation of a vision as there seen, not less strange in its reality, than those of his late dreams in their ideal phantasm. At last he asked, in French, briefly but courteously, how and by whom the room of the invalid came to be honoured as he saw it.

At the sound of his voice the woman's weeping abated, and in a minute or two had ceased entirely. She raised her face, now no longer hidden by the handkerchief, but read no recognition in the sailor's features. With a smile, in which a sort of satisfaction seemed oddly to contend with melancholy, she

rose, drawing her shawl about her, and advanced, not without dignity, though timidly, towards the couch, where, holding forth both hands to take Merrick's, she said firmly and composedly in Italian, "One that has outlived a delusion, has come to see and thank her friend and champion."

The intonation so well known, proceeding from apparently strange lips, might have led an imaginative mind to trifle in thought with the fable of the Vampire, and the assumption of another person by that puissant transmigrative soul, so total was the alteration of appearance in Madame de Malguet as compared with her former self. Two special causes contributed to this remarkable change; the first, the additional stature which the female garb gave to a figure insignificant in the garments of the other sex; the second, the absence of the heavy drooping velvet cap, which, while it covered and concealed more than one-half of the redeeming feature of the face, a noble and intellectual forehead, had also hidden the one personal beauty to which the inmost woman's soul of the lady of La Chalautre had, in its silent instinct, clung for so many years,—her hair. This, black as jet, in spite of years and sorrows, excessively luxuriant, and in its heavy fold resisting all attempt to twist it in the fashion of the day, was parted simply

on the forehead, and massed behind the head with such art as Brigitta could accomplish, after the usage of the Roman peasant women. The dress, rising high to the throat, was of the richest and costliest brown silk, made without ornament, but well and befittingly; a dark-coloured and very handsome Cashmere shawl, obtained doubtless, for they were then a rarity in France, at immense expense, enveloped Madame de Malguet's person, and by its folds made up in some sort for the angularity of movement inevitable in her case after such long usage of another costume: she had utterly rejected the ungraceful head-dress with which, in those days, women used to invite disfigurement, and the scarf of thick black net, which she had thrown by as she rose, served, tied over the head, to supply the want of such a covering. In such guise she stood beside the sailor's couch, and then, her greeting done, drew in a chair, and placed herself not far from him. Overcome by surprise, and in no small embarrassment, the sailor could only stammer forth some trivial question as to her sudden appearance.

"True," rejoined the lady, with a slight accent of scorn, "I should have remembered your English delicacy, and hastened to let you know that Brigitta is playing propriety for us in the next room. But a

truce with such trash — tell me of yourself; oh! you are fearfully changed!”

“’Tis the mere necessary consequence of a severe wound,” replied the sailor; “weakness is all my ailment now. Nay, do not look incredulous; I know all the stages of suffering and slow recovery in such cases already by experience; and you may trust my assurance, that, please God, all actual danger is long over.”

“But is there not the risk of fever? your eye is bright and dilated: and, tell me, what were those wandering words you were muttering in your sleep but now?”

“I was dreaming, I believe, of home and boyhood, and ——”

“And of your mother?”

“Of her, if I remember right. My head is weak with the wakefulness of an uneasy night.”

Madame de Malguet turned her head thoughtfully away, and was for some time silent; then slowly, and with much feeling, she said, —

“I have been for years playing upon my own self-deceptions, born of circumstance, eked out by pride, false philosophy, and idle romance: I am aware that it is only the earnestness and truth with which I followed out my fixed impressions, that has

at all dignified my position, and saved it in its eccentricity from —— ”

Merrick, with some eagerness of action, was about to speak, but the words died on his lips before the melancholy meaning of the lady's smile.

“ From utter ridicule, my friend,” continued Madame de Malguet. “ Nor has it done so indeed with the multitude. You only, and such as you, honest truthful natures, could understand where lay the reality in what seemed merely fantastic. The power to appreciate truths in one another is the moral magnetism that draws minds together.”

“ Nay,” interposed the sailor, with a show of his ordinary cheerly tone, “ do not embark my weak head on so wide a sea ; in my best days I am no moral philosopher —— ”

“ You are fortunately something better, and that is why I like you —— ”

“ But why,” Merrick hastened to exclaim, “ why and how this revulsion in opinion ? ”

Madame de Malguet turned abruptly towards him. There was a harsh suspicious gleam in her pale eyes—that sort of peevish irritation strongly expressed in the whole countenance which nervous hasty beings exhibit when idly questioned during fits of bodily or

mental torture. Her keen and angry look of counter-enquiry seemed as though it would read the querist's soul for the reasons of that question. The sailor's honest nature was abashed at the idea of having shown indiscreet curiosity: nothing was more natural than his speech, nor could be more eager than his apology; it was coupled, however, with the internal reflection that his friend seemed doomed to an eccentricity which she changed not with her garb.

The strange expression died away on the lady's features. She turned aside her head again, nodding slightly, but kindly, in answer to Merrick's voluble excuses, and, interrupting them, said, —

“That is not what I came for: had I not been strangely affected on coming into the room by — by your altered appearance and looks of suffering, I had done my errand sooner; but what I heard had — bah!” she added pettishly, while a slight vestige of colour passed faintly from her cheek — “I am losing myself in words. Listen, Merrick, I owe you a great and deep debt of gratitude: 'tis so; I'll hear of no disclaimer. You know me well now, and understand the determination with which I say I must and will repay it: say now how can I serve you? Let me anticipate my bequest already entered for you in my will—let

me purchase you a command; for all is money in England,—let ——”

“You hurt me more by these offers, my kind and real friend,” exclaimed the sailor, “than by supposing me capable of vulgar curiosity: money in my service, I have told you, can do nothing.”

“*Ahi di me! ahi di me!*” testily cried the eager and agitated woman, clasping her hands, “that I should forget! it is only your army you islanders dishonour, making money in it stand for merit; and you, my poor sailor, not even merit can serve you where money avails not!—but stay—I have thought of a thousand plans—will you, will you point me out the woman you could make your wife, and I will make you both rich—aye, rich and happy! You smile. Oh! yes, there’s some fair English girl that, in your heart, you love? No!—then wed in France, and let me choose your bride!”

While, with increasing agitation and impetuosity of utterance, Madame de Malguet poured forth these and like phrases in a volume of rapidly succeeding words, the room door opened, and Mère Lambert stood before them.

“*Trapiti, trapiti, trapita, ta!*” uttered the astonished suttler, as if in deriding imitation of the language that struck her ear; “that’s Italian, *à pas*

de charge too ! Is that the way you've been taught to speak in the sick ward, *citoyenne* ? and you, captain — *des mœurs, quoi !* women in the hospital, *mille tonnerres !* what next ? ”

Madame de Malguet's emotion, as far as regarded any external sign, was always transitory. She glanced for an instant curiously at the oddly-dressed and enormous figure of the speaker, whose words, ribald and rude enough, were meant, not for insolence, but in the way of expostulation, jocular though earnest. The republican tone grated more offensively on the lady's ear, than other words to which she hardly cared to attach a meaning. Rising while Mère Lambert was still speaking, she crossed the room to take her net-scarf head-dress, adjusted it, and her shawl, without appearing to notice the presence of any one but the sailor, whom she approached to say farewell : in so doing it unfortunately happened that she turned, and so stood with her back to the *vivandière*.

“ Good bye, Captain Merrick,” she said, “ I shall return may be to-morrow, for further talk on the subject we were speaking of : till then farewell.”

Infinitely concerned, for obvious reasons, in procuring Madame de Malguet's rapid evasion, ere Mère Lambert could identify her, the sailor has-

tened her departure by saying in Italian that he had little influence over his strange attendant in a moment of passion which to all appearance impended, and by requesting that his friend would avoid the chance of collision with one so much beneath her. These words could not be so rapidly uttered but that the time they occupied in utterance sufficed for Mère Lambert to place her heavy person on the other side of Merrick's couch, and, unconsciously, between the lady of La Chalaute and the door of her immediate egress.

“Call to-morrow, forsooth!—and with whose leave, I should like to know?—here is a pulse!” and as she spoke she seized the sailor's wrist: “fever again, I'll warrant; and all for a visitor that has not even the manners to see folks, much less say a civil word to them!”

“Mère Lambert,” said Merrick, in a quiet but commanding tone, “let this lady pass out the way she came, unmolested by word or action,—or, by my word, it shall be the worse for you in a matter you wot of.”

This half threat was, perhaps, indiscreet enough; yet it might have served the turn, but for the unlucky appearance, at the bed-room door, of Brigitta, who, hearing the sound of a third voice, loud and

somewhat angry, in Merrick's room, came with natural solicitude to assist her lady in whatever strait her imprudence might have induced. This second female apparition seemed to stike the *vivandière*, joined to Merrick's words, with something like conviction of the truth.

"A servant too!" she said half to herself; "and yet her dress—*mille tonnerres!* if it should be her there is a Providence?"

Anticipating Madame de Malguet in her move towards the bed-room door, Mère Lambert confronted the Calabrese, and seized her suddenly by either shoulder: a slight exertion of her immense strength turned the sturdy form of the waiting woman like a wheel on its axis, and thrust her back with more than needful violence into the inner-room.

"*Volte face, la belle,*" said the suttler with a triumphant laugh, as she slammed to the door and turned the key in the lock; then, opposing the progress of the lady of La Chalaudre, she cried in the same tone, —

"*Et toi, citoyenne—halte la!*"

"I am the Marquise de Malguet, woman," was the reply, "and add my order to Captain Merrick's injunctions for my being immediately allowed free egress, without insult or molestation, from this room, which, as it is in my dwelling house, is my own."

“ I knew it, I knew it, my heart told it me ! ” cried the *vivandière* with vehemence : “ there *is* a Providence — there *is* a God, aye, and a just and good God, that has delivered the aristocrate into my hands for all good and righting of wrongs ! Be quiet, *mon brave*, I’ll not hurt her ; I’m in the humour to hurt no one ; for now I know for certain you do not say your prayers for nothing. Aha ! ” she continued, grappling the lady with gentle but irresistible force by either wrist, and leading her back to her chair, “ you add your orders to the Captain’s injunctions, do you ? and you’ll be allowed free egress, will you ? you’re mistress and owner of this old barrack here, and of a lot of the like beside on the same tenure ? *t’es tout ça toi, la citoyenne hein ?* ”

She ceased her rude and insolent bantering, not for lack of words, nor matter, but to answer and restrain Merrick, who, during the whole of this brief scene of strange coercion, prisoned as he was to his couch, had used every persuasion towards the inexorable suttler-marchioness to induce her to forego what he necessarily foresaw would be the violent issue of the impending crisis. He at last urged Madame de Malguet to alarm the house, or threatened to do so by his shouts himself. It was this which arrested the

vivandière's attention, and disturbed her in the enjoyment of her wordy triumph.

“ Not so — *non pas, mon brave* — you'll do no single thing that runs counter to your pledged word and engagement as a man of honour, pledged to me no later than last night ; yet to make all sure among friends, you know, we'll lock the outer door to boot ” — and as she spoke, she rose, and double-locked the door of entrance. Merrick sank back exhausted by previous weakness and present emotions. How to reply to the Marquise's eager questions as to this alleged engagement, he knew not ; nor how to anticipate the course of proceeding which Mère Lambert might, in her violence, adopt for the establishment of her own rights and her son's legitimacy.

The certainty of her superior position in this respect seemed, however, to have a molifying effect upon the suttler's temper. She resumed her chair, after securing the door, with a degree of composure and deliberation the reverse of her previous manner. “ I said,” she exclaimed, “ there was a Providence in this, and if so, there must be one, as the Captain here says there is, in all else : *c'est bien*. If I have hurt you, Madame,” she continued, “ or treated you harshly, you must pardon the manner of an old *re-*

publicaine, and lay the account to your own haughtiness. I am not what I seem, nor you neither."

"And, in God's name, what are you, woman, then?" exclaimed Madame de Malguet, recovering from her surprise — "or what have I in common with you that you should speak of what I am not, or vex this wounded foreigner with pledge or promise in matters that touch me or mine?"

"Because," rejoined the suttlér, "I am she that was Toinette Grosbois — do you know me now? — the victim of your brother's fraud, the corrupted of his lust, the ruined, the outcast, the soldier's trull — but your brother's wife for all that!"

"Woman, you talk the idle tales of the countryside — things dead for years, and destitute of proof," replied the lady in agitated haste: "being what you say you have been, what is your assertion worth, even to your own identity?"

"Would you know me by a token?" asked the *vivandière* deliberately, setting her arms akimbo — "would you know me by what was said of you, that July evening of the day you refused Deslisieres?"

"There was but one other present," answered Madame de Malguet, confusedly, in a sort of awe-struck tone.

"Ha! you do remember it, then! — nay, I was there

waiting to meet him in the old Dutch cut yew-garden—you destroyed the remains of it two years ago—you had been riding more by token, and came in talk with him, dressed in your little scarlet riding frock and gold laced waistcoat: he was angered, urging you to take his friend; and you, wayward and wilful, jeered and mocked at the man's very name, till at length —”

“ Enough, enough —— ”

“ Peace, Mère Lambert !”

“ Peace, you, *diable d'Anglais* ! you are bound to me, not her !—Till at last he said—for he, you know, could speak a bitter word—that you would yet live to be a man's ape, and woman's parody: you raised your whip at him, and he snatched it, broke it, and cast it in your face! I was behind the yew-hedge and heard all. Do you know me now ?”

The unhappy lady appeared as stupified by the recital of such testimony, while, in the momentary pause, Merrick entreated the *vivandière* to let the scene close, and the lady go.

“ Why should I ?” cried the suttler-marchioness—“ who am I that she should scorn me? she of whom her brother's prophecy has, I take you to witness, this day been verified? I at any rate have been a woman and a mother —— ”

At this moment a loud knocking and the voice of

Lambert at the door urging for admittance reached the ear of the excited woman.

“Hark, ’tis he, come to claim his own! Hold me not, hinder me not, Englishman; ’tis you shall help him to it; ’tis you shall make her do right, or testify to the infamy of her wrong! I come, my son. I come.”

As she rose Merrick saw her reel and hold by the chair for a moment; she tried to move towards the door, but some power seemed to arrest her progress.

“He again, oh! he again, standing ever between me and my own;—the priest, Pierre, the priest! beat down the door and drive him from betwixt us!—or stay—call up the old *grogards*, the men that feared no priests, and at him with the bayonet! there, *mon vieux—et pour toi—et pour toi*”—and she motioned, as if serving liquor to her imaginary followers—“*en avant, —à bas les traitres—vive l’Em——*”

The door, shaken by the dragoon’s vigorous kicks, might in an instant more have yielded, had not the unhappy woman fallen with her whole enormous weight across it. To rouse Madame de Malguet from her stupor, to urge her to retreat by the other entrance, and shout to Lambert to break in by the

window, was all the sailor could do. As the lady disappeared in the sleeping-room, a window was burst in, and Finot, the dragoon, and all the wondering inmates of the house, with Josse and other servants, entered. It was too late. A heaving of the chest, a few stertorous sighs, and the suttler-marchioness was no more.

CHAPTER II.

DEATH in the hour of exultation, — prostration in the moment of pride,—fortune heaped high upon un-hoped success, — all things counter-current to man's hope, belief, and expectation; — such is the sum of existence. As in the elemental world, powers, influences, and attractions tend sudden toward some single point, by laws to men inscrutable, to work out nature's phenomena; so in our moral being the causes eliciting the crisis of a life act no less wonderfully on one another from quarters socially antipodean. What are these but lessons in the school of equality — exposition of the great truth against which the artifice of society would revolt—that there be, namely, no castes, nor classes, nor divisions among mankind, so that human life cannot be lived by any human creature as in a sphere apart? Like the exhalations of his earth, man circles and mingles in one medium inseparable from his kind: the delicate breath of Araby and the heavy fœtors of the Accursed Seas are charged with a like power, and, ranging wide in air, their office in the thunder-cloud is one.

Had in very deed the bolt of heaven filled that house with its stunning crash and sulphurous vapour, its effect upon Madame de Malguet could scarce have equalled that produced by the strange scene so unexpectedly forced upon her, and the stranger revelation it had induced. She trembled so violently on reaching the inner room as to be incapable of supporting herself. Brigitta hastened to her mistress. A chair was at hand near the door. She sank upon it completely unnerved. The recollection thus revived of her early days, and worst of all her brother's brutal taunt, so brutally repeated, — and before *him*! — were, perhaps, for the time, more felt than the announcement of another's rights as superseding her own in powers and possessions, in rule and rank, long so dearly coveted, and now so feelingly enjoyed. For a moment she re-lived the bitterness of life, the period we all have gone through, and all from time to time look back upon to breathe a sigh of thankfulness, and say, — thank God; it has been! She was roused by the dull sound of several voices in the next room, rising gradually from the subdued tone of awe to the different modulations of advice, entreaty, and command. The Calabrese knelt by the door, which in her turn she had double-locked; she gazed

intently, as chamber-maids for centuries traditionally have done, through the keyhole.

“ *Eccellenza ! sta morta la gran femmina.* ”

“ Dead ! ” ejaculated the lady, “ dead ! who ? Merrick ? ”

“ The huge woman that was so violent but now ; see ! that dark mustachioed man holds them back from her — the old hag-like withered servant steps forth with bottle and tumbler — ay ! pour out, pour high, — ye hold the glass to cold lips that will never drink more — he casts out the liquor, — he puts the glass before the dead woman’s mouth : no breath — no, no sign of life,” continued the Calabrese, with a sort of exultation,—“ *bella cosa, la vendetta !* She dared speak proudly, the bad woman ! to your excellency. There she lies that will never speak more ! ”

“ Alas, alas ! these are sad words, Brigitta ; why talk of vengeance ? if she be indeed gone, I may have reason not to regret it, but vengeance and I have taken leave for life : I can be rancorous henceforth no longer. Come, my girl, I am better, let us be gone.”

“ Not yet, ’ *Celenza*, not yet : that man, the tenant here, Picotot, comes in — he gives the captain wine : *cospetto !* he wanted it, poor gentleman ; — and there !

Dr. La Fosse was riding by — they have stopped him — he enters; — ah! of course — the pulse felt — the head shaken — she is dead; did it need a diploma to tell us that?”

“Up, Brigitta, up, and let us get back!”

“Nay, ’*Celenza*, nay, let me see the end of this for you: all are so occupied with themselves they think not of us. There’s consultation between Monsieur Finot, and La Fosse, and Picotot: the mustachioed soldier and the withered servant try to move the body from the door — ah! there’s another just come in, a lame old man, that has hasted from his shop grimed with smoke and rust: he helps them with the tear running down his soiled and weather-beaten cheek: another party with some of our people lift up the captain, to move him to the other apartments across the entry, and the body will lie here.”

“Then away,” exclaimed the lady now entirely roused, “we must be back at once, for I shall be sought for, and there are things which, now my full power of reflection is re-awakened, must, I feel, be instantaneously inquired into: doubt I cannot endure; go then for the notary, so soon as ever we have regained those dreary rooms which, would to God, I had never quitted!”

So saying she rose, and with the assistance of the

sturdy Calabrese, passed slowly through the vacant lofts, and reached the state apartments: these, owing to the prevalent confusion, had not been visited since their departure; and thus Brigitta went off in ease and confidence of heart to seek the notary. Him she soon found in company with La Fosse, who, deeming his interposition, as the lady's medical adviser, legitimately called for, would have accompanied the man of law, but for the jealous care of the ever-watchful waiting woman.

"Presently, sir, presently, I have no doubt my mistress will send for you; in the meanwhile ——"

"Let your lady know," interrupted the garrulous physician, "that the unhappy woman Lambert was quite beyond the reach of art by the time I was called in — a very sufficient stroke of apoplexy had carried her off instantaneously: for my other patient, —

'Languidus in cubitum jam se reponit,'

as Horace has it, or, which comes to the same thing, he is lying down in Picotot's room, no worse, I am happy to say, for the sad excitement of the morning; nay, he even proposed sitting up, if your lady would honour his sick room, to speak of some matter, he said, of importance."

“ Then Madame la Marquise has not seen Captain Merrick ? ” inquired the notary.

“ My lady waits,” replied the Calabrese, and passed on, staying no further question ; the old man followed her, his features wrought into an expression of doubt and much embarrassment.

“ Strange woman ! ” was La Fosse’s soliloquy, as he stood alone in the courtyard : “ sits in the house of death, and sends for her lawyer ! Whether there be not,” continued the Doctor thoughtfully, “ a separate moral organisation in such creatures, and whether they ought to be classed at all as the female of *homo sentiens* ? it’s really a question ; for my own part, I should very much incline to institute a subordinate genus ; and place my friend above there, together with that deceased suttler, that *Canidia militaris* Lambert is so grieved to lose (strange that too !), with other such, altogether among the *epicenæ* : it is a question really ; but after all, is it any thing but mere idiosyncrasy ?

“ ——— *quot capitem vivunt, totidem studiorum millia* ” — as Horace hath it. I’ll go talk the matter over to Merrick, till I’m sent for—to him not *with* him, for he has small philosophy,” — and thus ruminating, the worthy man paced slowly off to inflict his tediousness on the sailor.

During the short period which had elapsed since the *vivandière* closed her earthly career, a world of anxious thoughts had vexed the active brain of Finot, the elder. He was now released from his vow of silence; but the very visitation which freed him of the pledge that he had himself that morning broken, in the hope of strengthening his case by the material testimony of the deceased, placed him singly as head and chief assertor of a right, which, proven, would dispossess a patron whom he deeply esteemed and honoured, and whom he had for a life's duration so devotedly served. Bitterly the old man now regretted his disclosure of the morning; so true is it that a step out of the right path even for good bringeth with it evil. The lady had *not* seen Merrick: then was he wrong in his suspicion of her weakness? or had the habit of seeing [the bad side of human nature made him unjust to the sailor, and was Lambert right? The dragoon, absorbed in an (apparent) stern and sullen sorrow, had answered his references as to the course they should now take, at first with silence, then with impatience, and lastly with a direct refusal to hear aught of business till his mother's corpse were laid in its last bed. Meanwhile time, precious time, was lost; and again if his suspicions were correct, what might not happen in a day? Nay,

he had but now heard the sailor's message, urging an interview with the lady on matter of moment ; and what might that not be ? Never the old man felt, as with head depressed and brow contracted he followed Brigitta to her mistress's presence, had he more occasion for clear brain and cautious tongue than on the present.

On the other hand the trying difficulties of the moment were not less deeply felt by her who summoned the notary to her presence : determined to sift the whole story of her brother's alleged marriage, she was equally bent upon obstinately concealing the mode in which she became acquainted with it. To have this scene detailed, nay, the very terms, perhaps, in which the woman spoke, wrested from the testimony of the sole witness present—to find herself publicly exhibited as wrangling with the lowest of her sex, and enduring the base vituperation of the guard-room and the wine-house ! All the aristocrat rose within her as she thought of the bare possibility of so great a degradation : the loss of fortune and of power was as nothing to the infliction of disgrace and ridicule, so infinite in its extent as would ensue were all that happened known. To question Finot, and wring from him what knowledge of the truth he might possess, and then to obtain from Merrick an

explanation of the vague allusions by the *vivandière* to confidence reposed by her in him,—these were the prompt and ready decisions of the energetic woman. One, and one only shadow of a doubt as to the sequel ending in oblivion of what had passed suggested itself, but that was all dispelled as the Calabrese entered the room, and gave with marked emphasis and precision the message of which La Fosse had been the bearer. She also wished the scene unknown, but that for reasons which her mistress would have scorned. Madame de Malguet's heart glowed in her bosom as Brigitta spoke.

“He has anticipated my thoughts,” she said, “and read them truly in his own, and in this unobtrusive quiet way he tells me this.”

“*È galantuomo*,” was the brief and dry rejoinder, “but see—your excellency's notary;” and with this announcement Finot entered.

It was not in the lady's nature to make much pre-
amble where matters of importance were on hand, and this the notary well knew; he took his chair, therefore, and waited silently the commencement of the conference. In this instance the Lady of La Chalaudre even surpassed her ordinary suddenness of word and action. Secured by Merrick's message, as to the danger she most feared, her mind reverted

with a feverish earnestness to the half revealed mystery, and the self-alleged identity of her, whose lifeless form had but so lately parted from its spirit, with the heroine of that obscure romance, which, if true, so deeply affected her own fortunes. The conversation that ensued was a struggle between two minds, each of no mean acuteness in its way, to conquer one from the other that semblance of intimation of a fact which might authorise the mention of what, more or less fully, both were acquainted with, yet would neither tell. Brigitta, like a privileged familiar, was auditor of all that passed; she occupied, half seen only, a low stool behind the ample oaken chair on which her mistress placed herself, while all around the shapeless confused mass of goods and furniture, — the orts and remnants of past wealth and grandeur — formed no inappropriate accessories to the scene, — the havings and the hopes of their reputed owner about, perhaps, to be as wrecked and tarnished as themselves.

“I meet you here strangely, Monsieur Finot,” said the lady.

“I called casually in,” was the reply.

“Alone?”

“No, with Colonel Lambert.”

“Indeed! — on business, may I ask?”

“I came with the Colonel certainly at his request,

but also, let me mention, hearing that Madame was to visit the house to-day.—”

“ You wished to speak with me ? ”

“ Nay, only to ascertain whether in giving some clue to the forgotten history of many of these heir-looms, strewed and piled about the room, I might not be of use.”

“ It was truly thoughtful of you ; and, on the whole, a lucky idea, for without taxing your memory for a chronicle of chairs and joint-stools, there are matters of more moment on which your assistance may be of singular use, and even importance, to me and others, at this particular juncture.”

The notary bowed without speaking. It was a mistake, for had he risked an interrogation as to these matters, Madame de Malguet’s advantage as querist had been lost : perhaps the old man reckoned on her overtalking, a common fault in women in such delicate discussion, or thought her words pointed to the subject of his suspicions. As it was, the caution of his silence led her to believe he did know secrets of such consequence as made him dread to approach their very mention.

“ There has been a sad event here, since I came, they tell me.”

“ A poor woman struck with apoplexy, her death was most immediate.”

“ I heard so ; pray, who was she ? ”

“ A person, in her own sphere, of some note, but most remarkable as being the mother of an officer of distinction.”

“ Colonel Lambert ? ”

“ The same.”

“ He was a mere child of the Revolution, I have been told ; so that she —— ” and the lady paused for a reply.

“ She was a *vivandière* : ” and here again the notary was silent, where he should have continued master of the current of the conversation ; but he had no suspicion of the lady’s knowledge, or even inkling of the truth.

“ Is that all you know of her ? ”

“ I have heard —— ”

“ Pardon me, Monsieur Finot, I ask not what you have heard, but what you know.”

“ And if, with all respect, I might inquire why these particular questions are now made of me ? ”

“ Pshaw, sir ! ” and the lady rose, “ you palter with me ; you came here at Colonel Lambert’s instance ; was it to see the *vivandière*, and if so, on what business ? ”

“Our visit was intended for Captain Merrick, and we reached the house but to find the poor woman who had saved the Captain’s life and tended him throughout his illness with such care,—a corpse!”

“And—for ’tis a thing I know so totally unwonted for you to consort with men of Colonel Lambert’s stamp, that *this* even demands inquiry,—why come you in his company, and wherefore with him to his English friend?”

The notary took refuge in his professional calling, and, citing the point at issue as one in which another’s interests were at stake, declined with all humility, any direct reply, without permission of those with whose affairs he was entrusted.

“There is fortunately,” said Madame de Malguet, turning aside, “one plain dealing person in this house, from whom, as his name is mentioned in connection with this apparent mystery, and as he has himself expressed a wish to see me, I may expect some light upon the subject, be it what it may. Brigitta, send Josse to let the Captain know I come, and do you, my girl, and you, sir, if it so please you, accompany me.”

So saying, with an angry countenance, and lofty not unexcited air, the Lady of La Chalaudre assumed her ample shawl, and prepared to descend into the

court-yard, on her way to the apartments in which the sailor was presently lodged.

Sufficient time had elapsed to enable their occupant to collect his thoughts, and determine, with his plain right-thinking mind no difficult matter, upon the course he should adopt. His first decision was, as has been seen, to arrange in such manner as to prevent Madame de Malguet's participation in the scene of her miserable sister-in-law's last moments being ever revealed; his next to act faithfully up to his pledge given to the deceased woman, and in so far as in him lay, contribute to the recognition of her son's just rights. It was, however, a strange and trying position, and it was with deep distress of heart that he found himself compelled to become the primary agent in dispossessing his friend of those estates, and of that sort of semi-feudal sovereignty in which she fancied that she lived, and so fancying was, after her sort, happy. Alas! he had unconsciously been the cause of dissipating one delusion, source of her pride and imaginary moral superiority, and now in all consciousness was he doomed to dispel a physical error which constituted her whole worldly consequence, and being gone, left her a social nonentity. As to one point, however, the result of the meditated disclosure upon his friend's pecuniary prospects, and

position as a person of high rank and noble blood, Merrick felt at ease, certain as he was that the dragoon would act a liberal and generous part towards his new-discovered relative; while, if even with her wonted pride, she should disdain to share the proceeds of the broad lands she had thought her own so long, her private means, the hard won fruits of industry, were, he knew, ample. To tell the truth as it had been told him, to point out the place of deposit of the documents which would partly substantiate his statement, to call upon Finot for the further and stronger proofs said to be in his possession, was the immediate course which seemed to the sailor inevitable. His further cogitations were interrupted by the appearance of La Fosse and Picotot, each and either bent on be-prosing the good-natured invalid according to the separate wisdom that was in him.

The latter worthy personage had risen, as he said himself, amid the tumult and confusion caused by the recent event, *à la hauteur des circonstances*, "to the highness of the circumstances." The Picototte being fortunately abroad when it occurred, all parties concerned were relieved from the infliction of much feminine horror, and it may be no small amount of hysterics, while the purist in translation came out as

eminently useful, the occasion being exactly one suited to his abilities. To intimate the sudden decease to the proper authorities, to answer endless queries and questionings, to make the needful arrangements for the disposal of the *vivandière's* remains, all fell to Picotot, and with infinite importance and parade were all these duties executed. Lambert, or he whom we must continue for the present to call so, sat moodily, his cane between his lips, revolving many things, in silence and inaction, that though it misled some, could be hardly that of sorrow. The old crone Marthon, alternately the drudge, the butt, the companion, and the opponent of her mistress, seemed alone sensible of anything like grief, and these perhaps only because the event must put the manner of her life entirely out of joint. She acquitted herself of all the necessary last offices due to her whom she had served in life, and, not content with watching by the corpse, seemed inventively to devise little acts of service in which she continued to employ herself about it; now muttering to herself, now crooning drowsily some melancholy ditty, abstracted, and with a half-idiotic look, staring at those that spoke to her, and giving no reply. As to the funeral there seemed to be difficulties, for already was it whispered that the eccle-

siastics of the town would deny a resting-place in consecrated ground to the remains of the dissolute and godless suttler.

With the above, and such like gossip, prosed Picotot, the small chronicler of passing events, while on the other side of Merrick's easy chair, substituted for the couch by due medical suggestion, sat La Fosse, full of dry gibes and stale quotations; now philosophising after his fashion, now in a more practical vein speaking of his patient's plans and prospects, and, with a really disinterested interest in him, talking even of change of air and scene as necessary to hasten his complete restoration. The day had nearly passed away, and it was verging towards the early grey of a wintry evening, when Monsieur Josse presented himself with the message which we have above seen he was charged to deliver.

"Madame comes with her lawyer on business," said the steward, with a glance at the latitudinarian doctor, which meant more than that he wished him simply out of the room.

"La Fosse," said the sailor, who, predetermined, did not hesitate an instant, "have the kindness to go to our friend Lambert, and tell him briefly that I am charged with a duty by her that is gone,—that I am about to endeavour at its performance,—but that

for the full completion of it I have need of the case in which she kept her papers ; he may trust me by the token that I know more of its contents than he does, or if he trusts me not, let him bring the case to me.

The physician taking Picotot with him as witness to his mission, readily accepted it and departed. A few minutes afterwards Madame de Malguet, with Finot and Brigitta, entered the room, her manner firm, haughty, and collected ; her energies bent upon eliciting the truth, and all the strength of character which a casual weakness had shaken, restored by the sensation that an emergency was at hand. She who had witnessed, and struggled through so many, was again herself, not in the fantastic sense of being greater than her nature, but in all the real force of a courageous woman, great to endure and suffer. Perhaps it was this loftiness of sentiment, which so veiled all show of softness in her as to baffle and defy the deep power of Finot's observation carefully brought to bear upon the meeting, the more so that the course he should adopt might be in some sort governed by the discovery which his acuteness might arrive at. But there was another present, proud in the sense of her lady's self-command, whose glance, stimulated by affection, read deeper than the eye of

interest, however practised ; prompt to remedy any oversight in speech or manner, to aid the Englishman out of any difficulty which her quick Italian brain supposed the honest islander not incapable of incurring when the transactions of the secret interview were mooted, stood or sat the Calabrese, altering her position in a noiseless way so long as the waning light enabled her best to study the faces of the alternate speakers. Merrick was natural and easy : he greeted Madame de Malguet with just enough of warmth to countenance the idea of this meeting being their first, and led the conversation insensibly away with excuses at having troubled her, with thanks for her visit, with talk of his wound, and, lastly, with allusion to the death of the unhappy *vivandière*, in a manner to bring about the mention of the charge reposed in him, as a matter wholly new to his principal visitant.

“ The nature of that charge,” observed Madame de Malguet firmly, “ has, perhaps, reference to circumstances respecting the dead woman, as to which I have been endeavouring in vain to get a distinct answer from my lawyer.”

The notary had sat motionless, his eyes fixed upon the ground as was his wont, his ear receiving the sound of Merrick’s words as, after various answer

and reply, he approached the important peroration of his brief speech, with a sensation of astoundment. Could the sailor have become joint depositary with himself of the weighty secret? — was he in plain downright simplicity about to divulge it without previous consultation with him, without a word to Lambert, without a device, scheme, plan, or contrivance as regarded Madame de Malguet? — nay, could it be possible that this mere adventurer in arms, poor, landless, almost needy, denizen too of one of the most money-loving of lands, where gold stands for birth, title, merit, and talent, — that he, with the broad acres and fair forests of La Chalaute at his feet as it were, could cast away the chance upon the point of honour pledged to a dead suttler? The whole question of Lambert's rights shifted itself, and became as something new in the lawyer's eyes, so soon as the newly impressed idea of Merrick's simple fair dealing began to take possession of his mind. Why dispossess the present occupant? Why not assure the due succession of the rightful heir without disturbing the tenure of the nominal owner? In this spirit he interposed, following the leading question of the lady before Merrick could reply: —

“ The nature of the charge imposed upon the Captain, if it refers to affairs in which Madame is in-

terested, should perhaps be made the subject of discussion with her legal advisers, and not loosely promulgated in a sitting such as this, held extemporaneously, when the breath has hardly left the body of the opposite claimant —— ”

“ Of the opposite claimant ? ” slowly repeated Madame de Malguet, — “ then she has, or had, a claim, sir ! — and all your allegations of ignorance as to the history of this woman are mere excuses ! — Captain Merrick, you will oblige me by stating at length the business upon which we have this day met ; the reference to legal authority which my notary contemplates is, as regards what you have to say, or I to hear, wholly superfluous.”

Finot again interposed, and that with a degree of ill-calculated vehemence, which added to the excitement, and stimulated the inquiry, of the lady. Could he have gained time, the old man thought, to talk over either Lambert or Merrick, he at any rate might have been spared the bitter pang in his old days of appearing as a revolutionist in the family to which he owed so much ; but the sailor, true to his pledge, enunciated claims, the hearing of which Madame de Malguet refused to defer. Nay, he was himself cited by Merrick, as witness to the marriage whereby the *vivandière*'s son was legitimatised, and as depositor of

the sole official document extant, to prove the validity of the ceremony. Beside himself with choler and vexation, Finot turned violently upon the sailor, denounced him as intermeddling in matters with which he had not the remotest concern, and finally dared him to prove by any evidence producible, the existence of the certificate to which he alluded, or its copy, alleged to be extant in his (the notary's) office. The reproach was, however unjustly, still cleverly and forcibly insisted on; — the challenge for proof of the existence of a document before calling for its production, fell like a paralysis upon the sailor's enforced, but honourable advocacy. Madame de Malguet was, on the one hand, flattered at the vehemence, and gratified by the success of her partisan; on the other, mortified at once by Merrick's insistence on the rights of her opponent, and (strange contradiction) by his failure in making what at first sight seemed to be the abstract right of the case, better apparent. At this juncture, an unexpected intruder stepped among them. It was Lambert; he bore, slung carelessly across his left arm, the *bidon*, or silver-mounted keg, which served his mother, as we know, for both strong-box and record-chest. The discussion ceased directly his presence was perceived, and the three looked on him in silence.

The dragoon, in whose stern and melancholy features might be read, through the waning day-light, the grave expression of a decent sorrow, bowed slightly but courteously to the lady, and said with a deliberation that gave earnestness to his words : —

“ I have brought you this, Merrick, myself, not, good friend, because I in aught distrusted you, as well you know I could not, but for the simple reason that the mystery, a key to which doubtless lies in this singular receptacle, is not unknown to me. Yes, Madame,” he continued, turning towards Madame de Malguet, “ I was made this day aware of the relation in which I stand to you, and for your sake, as also partly for my own, do deeply regret the revelation of the truth : your conversation, — for you saw me not for a while, so engrossed were you all in it, — has told me that you were engaged in the discussion of this matter ; let me, I pray, take part in what so eminently concerns myself.”

Nothing could exceed the mortification and embarrassment of Finot at the unexpected apparition of the soldier : to Merrick, his presence was a relief ; while the lady, forgetting in the interest of the moment her prejudices, and perhaps somewhat impressed by the frank dignity of Lambert’s manner, invited him to be seated with them, and to exhibit, with the

sailor's aid, the important contents of that strange casket, fraught perhaps with fatal influences on her fortunes. Lambert, with brief acknowledgments, took his place beside his friend, and setting, with some appearance of exertion, the keg upon the small table round which they sat, asked Merrick to unclosethe it. The sailor had, it is true, seen the concealed spring but once opened, yet, with the neat-handed ingenuity of many of his profession, he had soon hit upon the secret, and the ebony heading of the miniature cask yielding to his touch, disclosed, just as the hand of her that was no more had thrust them back that night, the crumpled and discoloured bundle of old letters hastily and imperfectly tied together; beneath them lay rouleaus, neatly made, of gold coin doubtless, for nought else could explain the disproportioned weight of so small a vessel. While these two were thus employed, Madame de Malguet addressed the notary, after a brief reflective silence, in low and rapid interrogatory: —

“None, but yourself, could have spoken to yonder person on this matter?”

Finot bowed his head in acquiescence.

“You did it with the intention of following up the assertion of his alleged rights?”

The notary made no reply.

“ You did it, as conspiring to dispossess me of mine ? ”

The old man moved uneasily in his chair, but still said nothing.

“ Then what,” continued the lady with increasing vehemence, but still in the same low tone, “ what means your present advocacy of them ? are you all mystery, sir, and think you to juggle with us ? — speak ! ”

“ See yonder papers, Madame,” were the answering words ; “ I am not wont to throw away words in moments of exigency ; I will speak when the time comes, and as the time requires.”

Having said this, the old man settled himself, as one who would assume a wordless attitude, and make gesture, as it were, eloquent of the spirit of reserve. Turning abruptly from him, the lady cast her eyes upon the equally silent group before her. Merrick had selected a letter from the confused heap that lay before him, and spreading out the creased uneven surface, had placed it so that Lambert and he could read the words together. Both were absorbedly intent in the perusal. Another, and another, and another was taken up, read, and, by Merrick numbered in pencil, and laid carefully aside. This work proceeded with rapidity, for many, if not most of the

seeming letters, were sheets of paper containing but a word or two ; the names of a place of meeting, for instance, repeatedly occurred without a phrase or sentence else, save some term of endearment, and often not that. Others of these documents were of far deeper importance, though few in number. When such fell under the gaze of the two readers, easily recognizable to Madame de Malguet by their length, and the apparent interest they excited, she bent her pale grey eyes upon them with speaking earnestness of inquiry, but preserving great mastery over her feelings, neither asked as to their contents, nor attempted to hurry the proceedings of the friends with a view to the object of the production of these papers. The notary sat impassively expectant ; while in increasing gloom the winter evening darkened the chamber by degrees, and threatened soon to envelope the investigation of this dim history in actual night, as deep as that which had shrouded, to some of them, the term of physical existence.

Among the papers which Merrick and the soldier now perused, were some few authenticated by initials ; others without such valuable affix, but addressed as by a husband to a wife : another class of them partook in some sort of both these peculiarities of proof, but uncertainly expressed, as by the initial of

the christian name alone, and cautious, though evident reference, to a conjugal tie between the writer and the party addressed. There was one document, however, which possessed remarkable interest to the inquirers. It was in verse. At certain seasons, or under certain impressions, it would appear that the instinct of song lives in all animated nature, and that even the worst and coarsest are not unsusceptible of the momentary poetism that lives in them. Men under this condition, rush into rhyme, and in it commit themselves in every sense of the expression. Such had been the case with the writer of the notes under inquiry. A paper among them was inscribed, *À ma Marquise*, and contained lines to the effect of those quoted below, — sufficiently bad to be recognised as done by an aristocrat of the day, while at the same time they breathed a spirit of pseudo-liberty, fit to animate the breast of those who could, with the witty semi-republican Figaro, laugh at their own order, while crushing in hard serious earnest all beneath it, or speculate with Rousseau, while they practised with La-Motte.

1.

Rank,—oh! thou accident of birth!
Rank,—oh! thou cumbrous clog to passion!
Shall lowly charms, and lovely worth,—
Shall truth and love, ne'er come in fashion?

The hand that props the lazy vine,—
The face that owns it—shame in feature
And form, the high-born shapes that shine,
Paint, bright, in courts, insulting nature.

2.

Deck thee, my love, 'neath yon broad trees,
With simple gauds, and wild-grown flowers,
Nor gorgeous jewel sweet as these,
Nor hall so bright in lordly bowers:—
The time shall come, my low-born bride
Past pain with princely joys shall solace,—
And beauteous in her rural pride,
With village charms enchant a palace!

These rude verses were subscribed with the writer's initials. As the sailor glanced them over he thought of the things that had been done, — of the world that had lived and died, since in a vain hour these vain words were written, applicable to a future that was never to be, and redolent of a present, passing fast away into nonentity. He thought of her that was gone, and of the shape, lying not far from him, in which her soul had lived, — and that this too, soul and body, had been adored in its time with love-verses and the like. He looked across at the living form of one who had lived a loveless life, unsexed, and mused upon the destinies of women, stranger than those of men. The dragoon woke him from his reverie. The papers had all been read and arranged.

There was a sort of pause, and it was necessary for some initiative course to be taken, for the further progress of the strange and painful investigation. It was the notary who spoke.

“You have studied these dingy manuscripts, gentlemen,” said he, with a kind of irony, “and Captain Merrick has, with notarial accuracy, numbered and classed them; what is to be done next? what are they, and what prove they?”

“What they are,” rejoined the sailor, “I believe you well to know, Monsieur Finot, as also what they prove, if authenticated.”

“If authenticated, I grant,” interposed the old man; “who, however, will authenticate?”

Merrick made answer by laying the paper containing the verses before Madame de Malguet. The notary laughed slightly.

“Your papers,” said he, “have rarely a date, and never a name: putting the case that the Colonel were, indeed, what I have given him cause to believe he is, what value have such documents in a court of law in carrying out his case?”

“Why, the party to whom they are addressed,” replied the sailor, “is known and ascertained, the terms they use are unequivocal, and if the handwriting could be recognised, and sworn to ——”

A deep sigh, like groaning half-suppressed, interrupted him. The evening had now closed in, and it was no longer possible to distinguish clearly the features of the inmates of the room, much less decypher the faded characters impressed on those soiled papers which the lady had been in her turn carefully perusing. The notary, availing himself of the pause, continued his objections.

“And who will recognise this hand-writing? After so many years, it is idle to call on me to swear to its identity: and, to put the case in its extremest point of view, the absurdity of requiring Madame here to give evidence against herself, is what the claimant of her property himself would not dream of.”

Merrick and the dragoon would have replied together: the latter, however, signing to his friend, had liberty of speech, and answered the lawyer in his own fashion.

“And who, sir, is this claimant? If any one, it is yourself for me, according to your words but of this morning!—yet I disavow your agency. If I claim nothing but the admission of my legitimacy, the acknowledgment of my right to appear as heir to the property and honour of the house when a present possessor shall no longer hold them,—if I ask for nothing but a name now, and a right hereafter,—is

this much, when you yourself, who now repress my claims, were the first to urge their full and prompt assertion?"

"Ah!" rejoined the old man, relieved suddenly from much embarrassment, "now, now indeed, we approach the first glimpse of an arrangement, under which, let me observe (without committing myself to any promise), the proof of an important event may, as far as I am concerned, be much more easily arrived at than ——"

"Why hold you this language, sir?" exclaimed Madame de Malguet, in a harsh and angry tone; "why in one day do you say two things, opposite as light and darkness?—why acknowledge an alleged right, or seem to do so, and repress its assertion? What I have seen but now, has strangely moved me, borne out by what I ——"

Here, by a sudden movement, accidental or otherwise, Brigitta tilted from the table the sutler's keg heavy with gold, which with a mingled crash and dull metallic sound, startled the speaker in her too communicative earnestness. Some time was lost in finding the fallen object amid the darkness and replacing it upon the table, when the conversation was resumed by Lambert urging his desire to forego his present rights, if proved, in their full sense, under the

condition he had already stated. The notary was all embarrassment. Not to dispute the right of property in the broad lands of La Chalaute, as vested in their present supposed owner, was to leave her, not only the strength and power of wealth to resist at any time the validity of another title, but also, what he most dreaded, the option of alienating all, or part of these ancient and loved possessions; again, to drive forth her, whom he so long had served and honoured, for the sake of the heir, who, however rightful, was yet but a rude soldier whom he knew not nor cared for, was bitter to his soul. Madame de Malguet revolved other thoughts, in which the idea of a maintenance of her own power combined with the acknowledgment of the contingent rights of Merrick's friend was dominant. The renunciation of her state, her consequence, and her position absolutely; the rendering up of that, in and on which her very being and existence had for years depended, was something to which her imagination as yet in no sort tended. In this doubtful conflict of feelings and opinions, a desultory purposeless interchange of words occurred, as in like cases will do, among those most interested in the action of the moment. Merrick alone was silent, listening in the leaden darkness of fast falling wintry night to this talk, which boded of

nothingness. At length in the very inanity of these schemes and views, fearing to face the fact, the speakers paused. The sailor, charged as he felt he was, with a special duty, addressed himself painfully to its performance.

“ You speak,” he said, “ friend Lambert, of a suspension of your rights, if proved ; you, Monsieur Finot, of a sort of compromise ; and you, Madame, of half-acknowledgments of a doubtful tenure on your part, which in their incompleteness fail to prove the right of others : for myself, forced to partake in this mysterious matter, I have passed my word as exchange for my life, to one not now on earth, that I would, to my utmost endeavour, see her son righted, and fully so. Should you, Lambert, now suspend your claim, who could, with the slender present proof extant, depending on the mere life of one or two individuals, hope to see it proved in after-time when they are gone ? As to compromise, Monsieur Finot, in all things there is a right and a wrong, a justice and an injustice, and in God’s name, let each and either be admitted or rejected according to its worth ; and, lastly, Madame, what are your views but compromise under another colour, irritating to yourself by future uncertainties, and weakening perhaps the just rights of an actual

claimant? Whose are those letters? if your brother's, let formal documents exist or not, they were written to his wife, and the son she bore him is heir to his father's heritage."

There was no sound in the dark chamber save that of a woman's weeping. Alas! and was it *he*, who in the stern discharge of duty had swept away one more delusion of her life! Steps were heard about the doorway, and lights brought in by too officious hands. Rising abruptly, and passing quickly forth, the Lady of La Chalaudre made no farewell, but, followed by the Calabrese, mute auditress of all that had occurred, she stepped into her carriage, and went homewards.

Merrick was much exhausted with the day's events, and more especially by this latter scene. After brief leave-taking, for it was late, Finot and the dragoon stood beneath the carriage entrance, each about to go his way.

"Was I right about that man?" asked Lambert.

The notary pressed his hand in mute acquiescence, and with his feeble step, slowly departed.

CHAPTER III.

“ A TREASURE — and what is it ? ”

“ The golden image of the means whereby it was amassed: a monument to pure and noble labours; patience, courage, honesty, the philanthropic exercise of gifted minds, merit, genius, ability, translated into pure metal, but to be re-employed by and for, the powers that realised it; or else —— ? I could never understand the *non olet* of the coin-getter, and, when advised of how it was gotten, have thought the very value vilified when the thing it represents was vile.”

Of some such nature were the thoughts which wandered through Merrick's brain, as he lay looking through the wintry dawn upon the nearest novel object that the approaching day made perceptible in his chamber; it was the sutler's keg, stuffed with gold, but forgotten in the hurried leave-taking of the previous evening. If Merrick's thoughts were mere noble-minded nonsense, such as the generous heart dictates and establishes, where the head is not reflective enough to interpose a *veto*, — why let them pass as a winter morning theory, such as one thinks

a thousand of, lying in the limbo between rest and action. The antithesis to theory, in this instance, was destined to be illustrated by the sailor's servant lad, Michel, who, full of some strange vague tale that had already found its way down stairs of the cask full of gold Mère Lambert had left, entered the room silently for his usual morning duties, when his eyes fell on the mysterious keg, squatted as it were dwarf-like, with a fat and wealthy look, upon his master's very table! The Captain slumbered as he thought, the room was still, the keg, to his surprise, open. The influence of the gold, like the adamant rock of the Arabian tale, drew poor Michel, as it has done myriads, out of the right line of his duty (which on the present occasion lay in the direction of his master's slippers); and nearer came he, and nearer, stealthily on and on, until he could positively peep into the keg, which, true symbol of wealth, stood there with empty head, waiting for roguery to master it.

Art *thou* a rogue, Michel? — Truly it is sore temptation the sight of those rouleaux, tempting and tantalising too, for the envious cartridge-paper conceals their rich contents. What if he lifted one, just to feel the weight, just to say he had held such treasure in his hand, so much of the yellow metal

the world runs mad for? He lifts the topmost one, a spare one, lying loose on the upper tier close packed of those beneath it, one smaller rather than the rest, that might have been opened for present need, and carelessly refolded: such was likely, for as the lad tremblingly poised the little heavy packet in a hand that wondered at the weight it bore, an incautious movement brought it in contact with the sharp keg-edge, the paper burst, and of the coin, some slipped back into the miniature cask, but most rang in a golden shower upon the hard-tiled floor. Merrick started at the sound, and, with a wondering and an angry eye, saw Michel stand for a moment before him in the apparent dismay of guilt.

It was but for a moment; before the sailor could speak, the boy threw himself in the agony of innocence on his knees.

“*Devant Dieu!*” he cried, “before God I am no thief! no! — I swear a thousand times. I am none, none, no none! — the paper broke of itself, — I lifted it because I was curious, — I had never seen gold money, and I had heard so much of it, and I was curious to see it, — oh! *Monsieur*, I am a poor boy, — *savez mon honneur!*”

’Tis the way these people speak; an English boy would have cried for his place, — Michel roared, and

that lustily, for his honour : it comes to the same thing, I believe, but the higher sentiment certainly sounds the better.

Now Merrick knew that Michel was no thief, and so he told him, and thus comforted him ; but he also felt that an open keg of gold was no bait to let lie in the way of equal curiosity, and less principle. With something like a gentle imprecation over the carelessness of the previous evening, and with that sort of idle punctiliousness with which men make themselves amends for past neglect, he repacked the burst rouleau, and, sacrificing the water-proof canvas cover of an English portmanteau, he cut the same in such pieces as should when ingeniously corded round it, completely cover and conceal the costly material of the little keg. He had just completed the work, in the somewhat unnecessary exactitude of which he had exhibited that pride which men of mechanical aptness have in the display of their powers, — when the Doctor entered, his nose blue with cold, his eyes bright with excitement.

“ What see I ? ” cried he, with an exaggeration of surprise — “ Ulysses at the sea-chest !

“ ‘ Then bending with full force, around he rolled
A labyrinth of bonds in fold on fold
Closed with Circæan art ; ’

as Madame Dacier* has it? and whither away, most Ulyssean wanderer, with that diminutive and eccentric valise? are we to live in a world of wonders, and lose you in the midst of them?"

"No valise, Doctor, and no voyage; this contains valuables of Lambert's, which were overlooked."

"Valuables! *parbleu, voyons* — so this is the mysterious keg that all the town is talking of by this time!"

"So 'tis known already!"

"Known, ay, and by authority too; for Finot last night had a card party at his house, — the old fox! on purpose no doubt, — and the young folks danced, and what not, — for my Eugene is back from Paris again — and — and — *parbleu*, sir, I'm in a state of excitement that won't let me use my tongue — in short, he fairly gave us a gazetted account of the whole matter, and the Colonel is to all intents and purposes Marquis de la Chalaudre, *vive Dieu!*"

"It was precipitate to tell it publicly," observed the sailor.

"It was right and politic," rejoined La Fosse, "and will put a stop to any Quixotry that you and Lambert, — I beg his pardon, the Marquis — might

* Pope. — *Printer's Devil*.

try to hatch out of your conjoined naval and military brains — any foregoing of rights — no, sir, — no —

“ ‘Pone, meum est, inquit;’

that is the word — let the old aristocrat epicene specimen of *homo sentiens* make way for the republican noble, — and let the line be completed and fulfilled, —

“ ‘Pono, tristisque recedo.’ ”

“ Pshaw, Doctor, no Latin now I beg! it is a hard and heavy blow for her, poor woman, and hardly and harshly bestowed by one she most trusted! — and what more heard you? ”

“ Why, that you were going off with the Colonel.”

“ There has been no mention on my part of any such idea.”

“ ‘Lebedum laudas odio maris atque via.’

Eh, is that it? Come, come, don't turn in your bed that way; I mean, you intend to stay on here. Finot, who came late in from that old aristocrat's — your friend there — *Marquise Chassée*, as I shall call her henceforth — said last night you meant to go.”

“ She wishes it,” thought Merrick; “she would not have her degradation as she deems it, witnessed

by one so intimately partner of her thoughts in her day of pride and power."

His reflections were interrupted by the Doctor, whose naturally mercurial nature was stimulated to a state of fidgety excitement. He had moved to the window, and spied the dragoon approaching the house, a fact which he did not fail to announce to the sailor — classically and unintelligibly. In a moment after the Colonel entered the room, presenting in his appearance most striking tokens of the change which circumstance had wrought in his position. It seemed as if he had at night lain down to rise in the morning a new man; to a fanciful imagination the noble blood that filled his veins, vindicated at last from the stain of bastardy, and the blot of base origin, might have appeared as if coursing through the frame with a proud energy that lent to his figure and bearing, loftiness and lordly grace. Merrick's more matter-of-fact eye saw in his friend a man youngered ten years at least by the trimming of the heavy mustachio, the adjustment of the loose and bushy hair, the adoption, in place of his former coarse and heavy garments, of the undress uniform of his newly-recovered rank, which gave an air of military alacrity, well calculated to redeem the defects of a burly person. Adapt the thing to circumstance,

and there is the prose side and the poetry, even to a change of clothes. Their brief and mutual greetings over, the dragoon looked anxiously round the room.

"The keg?" inquired Merrick, "'tis here. I had a sort of lesson this morning for our joint forgetfulness of this treasure, and you see the result. But come, cut the lashing and count your gold."

"A dozen devils take the gold!" was the reply, "it was the keg I cared for; the one memento of what was good in her, *brave femme et bonne camarade! Palsambleu*, the gold! much good it did her that had it! She never needed a Napoleon of it; ration and quarters were all she wanted."

"Horace in over-alls," muttered the doctor. "Si ventri bene, si later pedibusque tuis, nil Divitiæ poterunt regales add ——"

"And now," continued the dragoon, cutting short the word with the quotation; "now what use is the beggarly trash but to bribe the *caffards* with *mass-money*, the canting priests that would wreak their vengeance on the poor cold clay, and give it dog's burial, because ——"

His voice faltered, and he turned away. La Fosse, whose pennyworth of observation taught him how, in some natures, grief needs the electric shock of anger to elicit its first solace, signed to the sailor, but

in vain, to prevent his speaking. Merrick, in his plain-dealing English way, merely saw in the matter a round sum, of which he wished his friend to be the better.

“But ’tis your heritage, man,” exclaimed he, with some warmth, “and you need it for a thousand things at this time; why refuse it, to add embarrassment to vexation?”

“My heritage!” cried Lambert. “How? as the suttler’s son, or the born noble? Tell me that, and I will take it! Listen, Merrick, and do you, Doctor, bear me witness,” he added, with increasing vehemence, “I will take nothing for my need but in my right. If I be noble, the owner of broad lands, let those who own me such, give me mine own to use; but the heritage of the suttler’s son I will not touch; when every needful form has legitimatised me, and acknowledged my mother’s rights and rank, this ill-got gold shall be turned to good and charitable uses; till then, no mortal hand shall undo the cording you have set on it.”

The night-lamp still flickered fitfully on the table, and by it lay Merrick’s watch and seals, which he wore in the old fashion. To take wax from the writing tray, and secure the cording round the suttler’s casket with four or five impressions of the

sailor's letter-seal (an anchor and his initials), was the work of less than five minutes. It was done in silence. Merrick was compelled to own to himself that his friend's determination was a just and noble one; while the Doctor, struck with the dragoon's threatened inroad on the revenues of his inheritance, found mentally a parallel in the case of that Iccius, whom his favourite author has immortalised by dissuading him from military extravagance.

"Yes," mused the classic herbalist, "Iccius swapped his books against Iberian hauberks, and that fellow will vest the value of a library in shabracks and bridoons, without a Horace, however, to celebrate the exchange. It's the old story; life, in its cycle of recurrences, less their poetry!"

A sort of bustle at the door, and the voice of old Grivet, the gunsmith, predominant above it, dissipated the comparison, and at the same time attracted the Colonel's attention to a source of annoyance for which he seemed prepared; such at least was to be concluded from the words which immediately escaped him.

"A pretty marquise I am like to have of it! Aristocracy sits unkindly on me, *palsambleu*! while I have republican friends to avenge the insults she suffers in me."

“Insults!” exclaimed the sailor, turning in his bed.

“Look yonder,” said the dragoon, pointing to the armourer, as he limped into the room; “there’s one met me this morning, and swore that come what might of it, the corpse of his old comrade, hers that lies there, should rest in consecrated earth, service or no service ——”

“I did so,” rejoined Grivet, interrupting him; “a battle-field is holy ground, for the cause the blood’s shed in sanctifies it; let man or woman die there, and take their rest where clay meets clay; but here ’tis different.”

The Doctor smiled, and listened with more attention.

“Here,” continued the old man, “they call you cursed in the spirit, if the body be laid in a bed unblessed.”

“A sort of earthly condemnation,” said La Fosse, “which wise men would not dread much, Monsieur Grivet — eh?”

“Every man has his superstition,” replied the gunsmith, doggedly, “and I have mine; I’ll lie where the best in the land do, and so shall those I have cared for.”

“Be the ground blessed or not, so long as you

assert the equality of all dust?" rejoined La Fosse, in his best tone of banter.

The dragoon, whose irritation had been manifest from the time of his entering the room, provoked at this profitless talk, based in all bad taste on so serious an occasion, took hard hold of the herbalist's shoulder, and moved him towards the window. In front of the house were some twenty men of the working class, equipped with such tools of their respective callings as might best do duty for weapons if occasion needed, while others in like guise seemed collecting toward this group, as to a point of union. The gunsmith had followed them: —

"Solon Griffard, and Ledru," he said, "and others of the old time, have settled it with me that Mère Lambert ——"

"Or the remains of her that rightly owns another name," interposed the dragoon sternly, "shall rest in consecrated ground, whether the priest will it or not."

"Good God!" exclaimed the sailor, "let them ruin themselves, Lambert, but not you! get you hence to the notary's at once, and take counsel on this matter."

"I am on my way to meet him at the lady's in the Upper Town, and will take off this money with me to confide it to his keeping; — and now, good friend,

to the main point I had to speak of; — I am leaving this place under all and any circumstances to join the —th at Rouen; come with me — at any rate as far as Paris; how say you, Doctor, the journey will do him good, will't not?"

The worthy man looked wistfully at his one patient, and feeling that a negative would be, as a great diplomatist, his countryman, once said, — "not only a lie, but a useless one," — assented with as good a grace as circumstances permitted.

"To Paris, then," continued the dragoon, "and when I think my fellows worth your looking at, to Rouen, that the old soldier may salute, at the head of his regiment his brother-soldier of the sea who placed him there."

There was the eloquence of gratitude in the tremor that marred the utterance of these simple words, and all the sterling truth of friendship in the hand-grasp by which they were mutely answered. Old Grivet looked proudly on during this little scene, as conscious of his share in the good work, while the tender-hearted Doctor borrowing to bestow on the dragoon the Horatian title — "*equitum decus*," by which the grateful poet erst honoured his great patron, betook himself to the window and his pocket handkerchief.

“ One word ere you are off,” exclaimed Merrick, as the Colonel reached the door, “ you know Finot has told all ? ”

“ I do, but trust in me — she is my relative, and shall be treated as if I knew not my own rights, nor her position.”

With these words he rapidly disappeared. At the door of the mansion, the dragoon, with La Fosse's assistance, induced the well-meaning but injudicious band of zealots to disperse, and for the present remain quiet, but it was with difficulty they did so; and, indeed, hardly had their consent to defer, at any rate, their enterprise, been won, when a fresh incident occurred to stimulate their enthusiasm for the plebeian noble. Grivet, who had brought down the heavy keg, prepared to bear it for his friend to the Upper Town, but the dragoon, steadily refusing to burthen his old comrade, or to profit by the help of any other there, placed the weighty treasure on his own shoulder, and with the gunsmith in his company, walked through the admiring street, towards the abode of his noble relative.

“ When the Marquis galls his noble shoulder to honour age, honesty, and service,” moralised the Doctor, amid the smothered *vive* of the spectators, “ we may live yet to see the true aristocracy uppermost,”

— and much thinking, if not deeply, on this fertile theme, the good man slowly followed them, taking his way to his domicile in the Upper Town.

Thither also let us, too, turn our thoughts, to the place where, with the last words of the man she loved ringing on her ear, sat through the dark hours of the night the unhappy lady of La Chalaudre. Her dinner was served on her reaching home, as usual; her books were placed as usual for her evening reading — there was Brigitta's chair,—her work,— the whole routine of ordinary life repeated in its cold reality;— and through the whole of it, coldly and mechanically, did this apparently impassive being go that evening, as she had done the eve that preceded it. Although changed now, and softened, womanised, and governed by a new principle, yet in courage and resolution, in the power to think and to decide, she was the same. Twenty-four hours ago she was powerful and wealthy, and she felt that, within that brief space, her rights to wield the power or own the wealth had devolved upon another. Had this happened a year previously, she would have resisted to the death the pretensions of the claimant, — nay, she even now would have inclined to compromise upon them, but that there was a thing now dearer to her than land or power, than feudal reign or lordly riches, and that was the

good opinion of an humble foreigner ; *that* governed her decision, for already had she decided, and hence the strange self-command she that evening exhibited, hence her apparent impassiveness.

“ I have sighed for my misfortune, I have sorrowed for my loss, I have wept like a woman as I am, under insult and mortification : what will my life long be, but embittered with the sense of power lost, that was so coveted, and so enjoyed ! but I will deserve and retain his good opinion, and live in and on that, though all else perish.” So thought she, and the thought was comfort to her, — nay, in some sense, so wonderfully and mercifully is evil tempered for man by the conditions of his moral constitution, it was a sort of equivalent for suffering : Merrick had marked the way, but it should be hers, she had determined to adopt it.

There sat she with the silent Calabrese in a peculiar chamber, which she had selected for the view it commanded of the country round. The mansion, I have mentioned, had been castellated, and abutted on the old town wall, a tower of which, in fact, formed part of it. As the course of time and events rendered the ancient fortification needless, two windows had been opened through the massive thickness of the tower ; and the ancient loop-holed ward-room became

thus a lofty and convenient circular chamber; the rough stone wall being covered with handsome paneling of a dark oakwood. Much of the furniture removed from the Hotel Picotot was in good keeping with the apartment, both as to material and fashion; but as if by that fatality which doomed the lady of La Chalaute to be ever surrounded by, or connected with, the incongruous, some articles of modern make, or rather in the recent taste of the empire, obtruded their stiff pseudo-classic angularity, their gilded sphynx-heads, and their needless bronze, in painful contrast with all else about them. These were due to Brigitta, who having been charged to procure some couch or table, deficient in the comfort of the room, used the opportunity to indulge the innate taste for the garish and the gaudy prevalent among the lower order of Italians. In the fancy of him, who, about eight that evening, entered the apartment on the lady's summons, — Finot, the notary, — the fortuitous commixture of articles for the service of its melancholy occupant, seemed emblematic of her fortunes, in which the modern pseudo-antique harshly obtruded to displace the last remnants of feudality.

She had sent for the old man in the first instance, not to consult him as to how she should decide, but to apprise him of her decision; and, in the next

place, to arrange that plan of immediate action upon which she had determined, and which, to her energetic nature, appeared imperative. In the hurried departure from Merrick's room, surprise and emotion had prevented her holding converse with the notary as to what should be the events of the next day, but as these feelings subsided, the necessity of some practical understanding became apparent with respect to the immediate future; and she who, when excited, knew not what was weariness, felt no compunction in rousing from his domestic comforts on that night of bitter cold, the old man who had from near dawn been so constantly and actively employed. Had she herself alone been to be served, the ancient dependant on her house might have been spared fresh toil, and fresh exposure to the biting air, but her mind was full of thoughts foreign to her own affairs, though most engrossing to herself. The idea that possessed her touching Merrick's claim upon her, the longing that she had to see him happy, and still more to see him happy through her means, took, from the hour of her ineffective conversation with him, stronger and stronger hold upon her fancy. There was another thought, too, that mingled with it,—the expediency, namely, at this juncture, of his absence, and on that, the natural result that such absence might be eternal.

What was there that bound or could bind him to that neighbourhood, or the land it lay in? — what interest in common beyond that caused by the accident of juxtaposition, had she with him? — and he with her, what tie save a partial sympathy in opinion? He would go, stranger and foreigner that he was, to other countries perhaps, where, unconsidered and unknown, he would pass as a unit in the sum of humanity, his merits unnoticed, and his worth unelicited; — or else, returning among his countrymen, he would waste his life in vain endeavours to have these merits acknowledged in more than words, and, failing this, sink into obscurity, too poor to live like others of his rank, too honest and too proud to owe worldly comforts and advancement to sycophancy and base obsequiousness.

Such fancies flitted through her brain, passing and recurring as night-hawks and ill-omened birds that fly fitfully abroad in the gloom of some stormy evening: but the oppressing weight was the necessity of Merrick's going, the difficulty of securing his return, her inability to fix him near her, the great gulph in short which lay between herself and her natural affections, lost to her in their very birth. Her ignorance of the usages of the world, the extent of which want of knowledge she had but of late

learned, made her dread taking any measure unadvised, lest it might, as in connection with Merrick, bring ridicule or discredit upon him: she therefore determined to speak unreservedly to the notary, as to the only creature capable of understanding the nature of her wishes, or of confidentially as well as devotedly serving her for their accomplishment. The nature and result of this secret conference was partly exhibited in the announcement made in his own house by Finot immediately after leaving the lady, and partly by the line of conduct she adopted on the following morning, as also subsequently. What reason the old man had for never alluding to its detail, may perhaps be inferred from after passages in this slight history. It was conducted, by Brigitta's account, in the round room, after her presence had been dispensed with, and the door of the antechamber double-locked, which may be perhaps considered by the wise an additional reason for the mystery which invariably hung about that nocturnal interview.

It was over; the notary departed; but Madame de Malguet's vigil ceased not. The steward was summoned, and much of the night consumed in the examination of accounts, in which the lady's habits of mercantile accuracy, and intimate acquaintance

with the state of her affairs, simplified the preparation of abstracts and reviews of rentals and revenues to be submitted, with a note of the mesne profits due to the real owner, the next morning, — to him whose right she at heart admitted, and would therefore in honour not dispute. This labour done, she addressed herself, deep in the wintry night, to a similar rigid investigation of the state of her own private fortune, judiciously invested for the most part in stock and on mortgage; her will was taken out, looked over, altered, and added to, nor did this prove the termination of her toil. She wrote; a letter apparently, the composition of which seemed to afford more embarrassment than any previous labour of the evening: several sheets of paper were at different stages of their contents, torn and burnt in the brightly blazing fire; for despite the late hour, Brigitta had been again and again despatched for supplies of fuel from the antechamber. She, poor woman, struggled the night long with her drowsiness, or at times dozed wearily, starting from her sleep at the sudden baying of some deep-mouthed watch-dog, or the harsh unearthly cry of the wild geese scudding on their migratory course overhead, and waking the echoes of the old ward-room with their glee in the free heaven, as in mockery of the merry laugh that

those same walls once rang to, which encircled now that sad untiring woman. It was not till nearly four in the morning that the lady lay down to rest; yet when as many hours afterwards she met the notary again in the round room, there was small evidence in her appearance of a night spent in mental toil. She was serious rather than sad, composed more than depressed; the compression of the mouth spoke the determined mind, and there was a lofty look about the face and air, unwonted in such a degree, yet not offensive: there was pride at work within visibly,—it might be in the sense of rectitude maintained at every hazard,—it might be in the triumph of victory over self, at a sacrifice the extent of which none could estimate, but the victor. She entered, having in her hand a sealed letter, which, after acknowledging the notary's low reverence, she confided to his charge.

“ You see the address,” was all she said; “ let it be sent accordingly, or, stay, give it rather yourself.”

The old man bowed.

“ And Père Bouchè,” naming thus by his familiar appellation the chief ecclesiastical authority of the place, a man more feared than loved —

“ Will be, he assures me, punctually here at eight o'clock —— ”

“ And — ” there was an attempt to articulate which failed: the throat swelled, and choked the bidden words, while a gush of tears, unbidden, reddened the pale eyes. It was long, indeed, since those words had been spoken; the world had changed since then, as had the speaker; they were as the sound of old days made young again, and renewed, oh! at what cost! Madame de Malguet walked towards the deep embrasure of the window, and after a while turning in her abrupt way, she inquired with a forced and unnatural deliberation ——

“ Will Monsieur de La Chalaute honour me with his presence also? ”

“ He has so promised,” was the reply.

A deep silence ensued, which, after lasting some minutes, was broken only by the arrival of the priest. He was allowed admittance instantly, a silky-mannered man, that looked like one who, having unrighteously stolen his right to bind and to loose, would glide with it stealthily through the world lest any one should charge him with the theft. Madame de Malguet received him where she was standing, in the deep window, coldly, but with due respect, while the notary watched from time to time, unobserved,

the progress of a conversation he did not attempt to follow. It was not a long one; Père Bouché, after listening in a sort of deferential surprise to some statement made by the lady, appeared by various deprecatory and apologetic actions to be engaged in offering alternate excuse and remonstrance; then, on some further observation of the Marquise, of which the words "*messes*" and "*les pauvres*," somewhat emphatically pronounced, alone reached Finot's ear, the good man seemed to be affected by a fervour of devotion which strongly threatened to become practical. Recalled from the necessity of present prayer by the lady's abrupt removal from the window, he took his leave in a flood of sanctimonious phraseology, by which perhaps Brigitta was the only person present in any sort edified, and she, good Catholic, kneeled by the opening door, and took the good man's silky blessing. Whether the deeply-muttered invocation wherewith he was himself encountered as, passing the outer entrance, he met Lambert and the gunsmith, were of a similar character with his own valedictory expressions, is a point so little doubtful as to merit small inquiry.

"*Mon brave*," said the dragoon to Grivet, "you have to serve your apprenticeship to high company, and here's a fitting place to do it in."

He looked about him as he spoke. The entrance-hall in which they stood had the look less of hall than cloister. The wall on either side was lined with stone benches, and at the other extremity was a broad stone staircase with very low steps, which led to the upper apartments.

“Here for centuries, doubtless,” said the dragoon, “have the retainers of La Chalaute waited the pleasure of their lord, and here must his friend and comrade wait the pleasure of their lady; ’tis the fashion again, old friend, which will last its time till better days come.”

“I’ve slept in a worse guard-room,” answered the old man composedly, “I’ve waited before this till I was wanted, and do it now, though if it’s on my account you’re delicate, don’t mind me, — *’cré dié!* I care as little for your Marquise as for an unbreeched barrel.”

So saying, he dusted the stone bench with his handkerchief, in a spot near the white door on which the wintry sun gleamed cheerfully, and sat him down, just as Josse arrived with his ceremonious invitation to the Colonel to join his lady; and Nicholas hastened with an officious eagerness (having perhaps heard, in Falconbridge’s phrase, that “there were toys abroad,”) to relieve him of the package he still

bore. This done, the three ascended the wide stair, leaving the gunsmith contentedly sunning himself, thinking of his new lock alternately with his old friend's interment.

The dragoon was conducted from the staircase along a wide low gallery, hung sparingly with family portraits, and thence into the anti-chamber in which sat the ever-watchful Calabrese. A momentary impulse caused him to hesitate, as the steward with stiff courtesy intimated that his lady occupied the room they were about to enter, for he felt half inclined to summon the notary and inquire the terms on which it was intended to receive him; but no, he rejected the idea as an unworthy one, and with a proud and generous confidence strode onward, making no further question.

Madame de Malguet sat, as he entered the round room, at a small octagon table, placed apart; Finot, at the larger one of oak, handsomely inlaid, on which were strewn papers with the materials for writing. Both rose as the dragoon crossed the threshold; the lady bowed her head with dignity, and there was a momentary pause while Nicholas deposited his burthen and withdrew. When the door had closed, the notary respectfully addressing his patroness, informed her that the gentleman who stood in her pre-

sence had been hitherto commonly known as Colonel Lambert, a distinguished officer now in command of the —— of cuirassiers ; — that circumstances, known to her, caused this gentleman to lay claim to near relationship, in fact to the highest position, in her family ; — and that she, having requested him to attend personally to discuss that claim, was now called upon to pronounce her private views respecting it.

The sound of the old man's voice died out, but no one spoke in answer. Madame de Malguet remained intent in perusal of the dragoon's features, as if searching confirmation ocularly of that which she believed to be the truth, that he who stood before her was in very deed her nephew ; she had heard, without noting, the conventional address of the old lawyer, and forgot that it was hers, by agreement, to speak next. The dragoon, whose attention had been riveted upon Finot, broke the awkwardness of silence at such a moment by the deep intonation of his manly mode of speech.

“ This, Madam, and Mr. Notary, is, I presume, formal and proper to this occasion. It may be the prelude to an act of grace, or what is intended as such, acknowledging by favour my pretensions to the extent that may suit Madame La Marquise. With

all respect, let me be understood to declare that, grace me no grace, I treat as from equal to equal. I come not to defy, nor to dispute, but to assert a right, which if this lady, before God denies in its least title, knowing as she does that, before God, I speak the truth, I will hence to bury my mother's corpse in the face of what they call the law, and then leave the law to deal with the last scion of your house as deal it may !”

They stood there, those two strange relatives, the aristocrat and the republican, each proud in their special pride, and chivalrous each after their own manner ; the one, in the spirit of her order, having pre-arranged a sort of concession to be brought about by formulæ, irreconcilable with the expression of natural feeling ; the other, with a sort of indignant fierceness, rejecting at such a moment aught but the plain admission of the truth, asking but that, yet meditating instant violence at all hazards on refusal of it. Lambert had almost turned to go, when Madame de Malguet detained him.

“ Hold, sir,” she said—“ the sight of your features overcame me, and made me omit what I should have said long ere this : — you are my nephew, my brother's son, and in right of that descent Marquis de La Chalautre, and lord of that domain — ”

Here she paused, as if overpowered, and sat down, motioning Josse, who turned as to seek assistance, that he should not stir, but still with an appearance of effort, she continued speaking —

“ You think nobly enough to come of noble blood, and I have done you wrong in thought, for which I would make amends by treating you as my good kinsman — nay, hear me out : — the burial, — the remains of my brother’s wife, I mean — the ——”

Her voice failed her, — she leaned forward on the table ; — Josse this time left the room, and returned with Brigitta, who with such simple restoratives as the case required, tended her mistress, while Finot explained to the dragoon the unbidden act of sisterly regard offered that morning to his mother’s memory. The newly-owned nephew spoke not, but advancing took the nearest chair, and seated himself by his relative : there was in the act neither familiarity, nor presumption of manner, but a show of natural and even affectionate interest.

“ You have bound me to you, Madam,” he said, in a low but not untroubled tone ; “ I came predeter-
mined to win your consideration by self-denial, but you have forestalled me, conquering me by kindness : let those present bear witness,” he added, “ and let

another witness I brought with me, Madam, be summoned — an old friend ——”

“Heavens!” exclaimed the lady, “is Merrick able ——”

“I said,” interrupted the Colonel, “an old friend, not a dear one of late date: Merrick has helped me to my marquise, but old Grivet who remembers me a common trooper, shall witness my first act as a titled noble.”

While Josse went to summon the gunsmith, the dragoon produced a written paper which he handed for perusal to Finot. The old man glanced at its contents, then with a kind of earnest satisfaction, read them with care and deliberation, and rising bowed as in acknowledgment of a serious favour to him who *was* Lambert.

“This gentleman, Madam,” said he, with the full-drawn sigh of one relieved of heavy embarrassment, — “has most generously and nobly — nay, I must be allowed this once to say so, Colonel — most generously, I repeat, set at rest the point upon which I own I was most anxious; — these papers, these abstracts, these accounts are needless save as memoranda; the Colonel relinquishes his claim to mesne profits, — his right of possession of La Chalaute, its revenues and signories, or that of any other of the

family estates or properties,—he delegates the whole of these to you, Madam, and declares himself heir only in expectancy on the formal establishment of his title, and acknowledgment of his legitimate descent;—till then he desires to be known by courtesy by the name his mother gave him, the one his father bore, Jean-François de La Chalaudre, and to have such aid from the revenues of the family as a cadet of so noble a house may need to maintain his rank with:—the terms,” added the notary, “are not quite technical, nor the paper drawn in any form, but we can recast it, and alter ——”

“Not a word,” interposed Madame de Malguet, in her sudden way, but much affected, with those tears rolling down her cheek that the great-hearted shed when they hear tell of a noble action; “not a word shall be changed, nor shall the language of chicanery sully the record of a noble act!—oh! you too have bound me to you, and by that sympathy which enchains kindred natures!” she continued, turning to the dragoon as he sat by her, “by no other title shall you be known than that is yours by right, and shall be soon by law;—you see I do not say I take your generous offer ——”

“’Tis needless,” replied the dragoon; “you would

not live, Madam, were you to lose your occupations; that I have long thought, judging from what Merrick half said from time to time: and I, what should I do with lands and livings?" "But Merrick," interrupted the lady with anxiety in her expression, "did he advise ——"

"He!" rejoined the Colonel; "you do not know him, Madam, if you think so!"

"No! I do not think so, I asked idly and unworthily; he would as little rob one friend of his rights, as insult another by any low and pitiful intercession for his personal interests, the friendship, that, of a mean mind; but ere we speak of him, what of your own plans?"

"To Paris first, then to my regiment."

"Finot shall go with you ——"

The opening of the door interrupted the conversation; the intruder was Grivet, who limped in, followed by Brigitta ——

"I can wait downstairs," said the old man, making his military reverence, "but I cannot play the lackey; *cré dié! je ne fais pas antichambre, moi!*"

The unceremonious declaration and the unlicensed entry would have roused the ire of the high-born dame an hour before, but the interval had served to make her think better of republicans, more espe-

cially of republican soldiers, and instead of resenting the freedom, she was, or affected to be, amused by it.

“ And why came you not in, sir, at once ? ” she inquired.

“ I was prevented,” answered the gunsmith with a jerk of his head towards Brigitta, “ and we have both been wearing our knuckles out against these old door panels, until my patience wore outright, and —— ”

“ It is well as it is, friend,” observed the dragoon ; “ this lady in whom I beg you to recognise and honour an esteemed relative of my own, will forgive your finding your way as you have done into her apartment if you will witness, with Monsieur Josse here, the document which will be read to you.”

There was, or seemed to be, in the words, and manner of his ancient comrade, a loftiness of tone which jarred upon the old man’s heart. What ! was the thought, does he play the feelingless haughty aristocrat already, treating his old poor friend with the icy courtesy of scorn, like the woman that sits by him ! Is the cursed leaven so active as to raise pride in the bosom of a true son of the people within the first hour of its admixture ? Such, and many such queries flashed on the instant through the gun-

smith's angry mind, as the notary, requesting his attention, read and explained to him and Josse, the purport of the document they were to witness, and wound up his address by informing Grivet that Madame de Malguet's intervention had removed all risk of any inconsiderate attempts in the disposal of the remains of her that was no more.

The wrath of the old man melted within him as he listened. Had he been correct in fancying a change in the manner of his friend's address, or was it in truth his own mere jealousy that angered him? Could he that registered his voluntary abnegation of wealth, and who put himself in the condition of a dependant when he might command all, assume in the plenitude of new-blown power a style and tone at variance with every principle he professed, and that towards his ancient brother in arms? The gunsmith adjusted his horn spectacles without a word said, to sign his name or make his mark, at the place noted to him, but there was a mist on them, or a dimness in the eyes they covered, that rendered this a matter of some trouble. His only feeling was that of admiration at his friend's conduct, forgetting in the generous sentiment the double weakness of our nature, which will allow to no man sudden elevation without the penalty of some presumption, nor per-

mit his former equals to witness his good fortune unsullied by the moral stain of envy in the midst of gratulation. But both these weaknesses in either of these men had passed away, the one at the sight of honest emotion, the other in the frank acknowledgment of a noble act.

“Madame,” said Grivet, as he raised his head from the paper he had signed, “you have gained this day a worthy relative who will be true to you, as I have known him true to all he ever loved or cared for; and for you,” added he, wringing the dragoon’s hand, “were you all the marquisses that ever lived since the days of King Pepin, you will ever be Pierre Lambert to me: I go to quiet Griffard, and Ledru, and the rest, and tell them, Madame, what we owe you.”

He drew himself up, made his salute, and left the room. Meanwhile there had been much interchange of words between the lady and her nephew chiefly touching the course he should pursue with men in office and her friends in Paris, and, at last, regarding Merrick. The dragoon mentioned his proposal touching his friend’s leaving Plassy with him, which Madame de Malguet warmly assented to, adding, however, some doubts as to his return. The Colonel was silent.

“ Might we not try to fix one who has rendered us such services,” continued she, “ in or near the place of our residence, which we may term the scene of his good deeds ? ”

“ My regiment must be my home for the most part henceforward,” replied the dragoon evasively.

“ But yet you must be much at La Chalaudre ; you must learn to know the people and the lands that are yours in fact, and will be yours soon in very deed ; I may assure you that the rigidity of discipline will, at a word from me to influential friends, be relaxed to what extent you like.”

“ I love my service and my corps,” was the answer.

“ But still Merrick is dear to you ? ”

“ To tell the truth, Madam,” was the reply, “ I like men to choose their own homes ; I have had too bitter an experience of what a compulsory residence is, not to sympathise in the liberty of choice in that matter ” ——

“ Yet,” urged Madame de Malguet, “ why speak of compulsion ? Merrick has few friends and no favour in his own foggy island ; why not tempt him to a more genial land where he is known and loved ? ”

“As how?”

“I owe him a deep debt of gratitude, which I can in no way pay by any mode of benefit that he would admit; but if a friend,” she continued hesitatingly, “could find out whether a fair — whether, I mean, a French — alliance were not distasteful to him in this neighbourhood, — a — a marriage in short with one whom he could like, — if he would take the bride, I, I would find — that is, would see her dower were ample, — and that from my private funds.”

The dragoon placed his cane between his lips, smiled faintly, rolled in his chair, and played the Beresina trumpet march after his accustomed fashion. Meanwhile the notary had, with the astutest glances, followed the expression of either speaker as he gathered, classed, and tied together, the voluminous papers on the table, an occupation with which he affected to be entirely occupied.

“You do not speak, sir,” observed Madame de Malguet with something of her besetting impatience.

“The matter, Madame,” answered her nephew slowly, “is one which a female, rather than a male friend, might best broach to the Captain. Were I to speak of such things, he would burst into one of his hearty ringing laughs that make the very ceiling

sing with mirth, and so scout the idea with mere merriment : — I did, it is true, once say, —— ” the words lingered on the speaker’s lips.

“ What, sir ? ” enquired the lady. Her tone was so sharply imperious that the dragoon turned towards her a grave glance of counter-enquiry. She felt the rebuke, and with a tremulous sigh motioned to him to go on.

“ I once did ask him whether half-pay and a rich wife in France were not better than half-pay and starvation at home, or something to that effect —— ”

“ And he answered ? ”

Again the dragoon fell into a provoking state of abstraction not uncommon to him when uncertain on any point.

“ Madame la Marquise asked you, Colonel,” said the notary, “ what the Captain’s reply was.”

“ Listen, Madame,” exclaimed the person addressed, without the semblance of attention to the last speech made to him, “ I will take Merrick with me, and, when all is well with us, he shall return and see me, live with me, in your house ; write to him now and bid him go.”

“ I have done so.”

“ But in your letter you have, perhaps, let no hint

drop of what our wishes are respecting him in that particular point."

"A vague allusion sufficient to attract his attention to the subject."

"Then do you, Madame," continued the dragoon, "follow up the execution of your project in the only way which could secure the chances of success: fix yourself upon a person worthy of our friend, and one likely to be attractive to him; arrange as you will in your liberality as to worldly means by which our friend may profit, and I engage to bring him back, and do my best to second all your views for his retention here among us: we must throw Fortune at his head the foolish fellow."

"She could not light on worthier shoulders," interposed Finot, on whom not a word of this conversation had been lost, "but 'tis not he could ever make her settle there himself, — an anomaly among Englishmen."

"Give me back the letter," exclaimed Madame de Malguet suddenly to the last speaker, "I will re-write it: Colonel," she added turning to him, "arrange as you will for the credit you require at our banker's with Josse, or take from him here what you will: all is your own; your horses ——"

“Are ready,” eagerly interposed the steward, “the pick of eleven of the best colts that ever left our paddocks: the tenants claim their old right and custom of finding the heir-male’s war horses on his coming of age, and the struggle is already who shall be preferred.”

“On my word,” exclaimed the soldier with a slight laugh, “I find that feudality has its advantages! — But, pardon me, — or rather let me try to pardon myself;—I have sad and serious duties to perform this day, and my levity is miserably out of place. Alas! I have lived my life long at such close quarters with death that he shocks me not, even falling on my nearest relative, — but she was of the bivouac too like me, and cared for the grim king as little. Farewell, Madame,” he continued, “I will not see you till confirmed in my right and acknowledged by my title.”

“Marquis de La Chalaudre, my nephew,” rejoined Madame de Malguet, “I call you as you are, — may God grant you life and happiness, out of death and doubt, as He alone can do!”

And so broke up this conference, the lady retiring to write first to Merrick, and then of what had happened to friends in Paris and to prepare them for her

nephew's arrival: the dragoon going forth with Finot to lay his mother's body in the earth, and then make brief preparation for his immediate journey, not forgetting to commit to the notary's custody the keg of treasure, as corded by Merrick and sealed by himself.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE is in isolated morbidly sensitive minds a tendency to alternate, in relation to the same object, between affection and a species of repugnance, not however unaffectionate. The dearest friend as personally connected with distasteful occurrences is, to such, for the time insupportable; not that he or she be loved the less, but because the idea of that which revolts or distresses is doubly painful when involved intimately with the person or the presence of a being, loved and esteemed.

Without entertaining any such conception in the abstract, Merrick had sufficient experience of the singular character of his friend of La Chalautre to be aware that she ought at this juncture to retire within herself, a wish conveyed in the indirect intimation of what she desired should be his own plans. He busied himself, therefore, after the departure of his visitors in the simple preparations required for his journey to Paris, and in such correspondence as the announcement of his change of residence demanded. A hint of his intention given to Picotot

threw that worthy person into a state of melancholy abstraction, which I must do him the justice to say was not mitigated by the payment in advance of the sailor's rent for three months during which he proposed to be away.

"I dare not make part of this announce to Amandine," sighed the dejected man, as he pressed the sailor's hand, and stalked from the chamber. Dreading the temptation to talk, and fearful of the visitation of temper which an incautious word would induce, he took refuge in an ode to Friendship, and soon entangled himself in an unmanageable simile; finding the muse averse, the poet invoked Fortune, that is, he played gloomily the evening long at dominoes in the café. While his host sought in this deep excitement to alleviate his regrets, Merrick pondered over a letter, written in Italian, which reached him late in the afternoon, and which ran as follows:—

"PLASSY, LA TOUR CHALAUTRE.

"*Thursday.*

"This is the second time I write to you. My first letter was not sufficiently explicit. Why this was the case, you will learn as you read on.

"My friend, I have in all patience and submission accepted my destiny, and bowed to the will of God;

and that, understand me, not in any altered spirit, not in any revulsion of feeling, not in the indifference of despair, nor yet in that dogged and sulky endurance which good folks sometimes call Christian resignation. I have done so, being the same Ursule de Malguet as ever, on the same grounds as those on which I formerly prided myself on my position, with a spirit as aristocratic, aspirations as chivalrous, a devotion to the interest and aggrandisement of the noble stock I come of as great — nay, greater than before ! And why ? because I have learned, alas ! — to know myself : — when it is the will of Providence to raise from his obscurity the lord of the old domain, the *woman* who vicariously administered in his place should yield her charge up, rejoicingly, if he be not unworthy of its honours : her heart should be gladdened when the thought strikes her of the perpetuation of the old descent in its direct line through the heir male : if the serfs and vassals of the house shout and clap their hands, so should she, for is *she* not man's born vassal ?

“ Am I glad, indeed, you ask ? Yes, in very deed, — glad as a woman is, sadly. Am I happy ? Yes ; — and again in the same sense, feeling that in the world, and its business, my woman's place is secondary. Joy or sorrow as connected with such

things must reach us by a sort of reflection from another object. Our place is elsewhere, and there lie, — ” (three or four lines were here carefully erased ; — lower down the letter continued) —

“ — There lie, I would say, a mass of prosaic matters, which my eccentric course has kept me from encountering. In truth, I was happier in my delusion ; but what honest heart would prefer happiness living in a lie, to the acceptance of a depoetised existence truthfully, in the proud consciousness of performing a duty with chivalric self-denial ?

“ And yet is, indeed, all this not itself delusion ? I make you smile with these disjointed queries, but truly I do so doubt myself now, as to distrust the reality of every impression. I am nominally dispossessed of the estates, but nominally only, and I fear that the contentedness with which I bear *this* lot, would crumble beneath a different dispensation. My nephew has behaved with the nobleness that becomes one of his blood. It is the inherent hereditary attribute of his race, the jewel which no attrition with the flints and shards of republicanism can tarnish, which has exhibited itself in him directly he found himself in juxta-position with one of his own family.”

Merrick laid down the letter at this place, and

pondered over the infatuation which could speak of hereditary virtue in the son of such a father ! The prejudices of his friend seemed to grow in strength the deeper they struck, like shrubs fresh planted, into a richer and softer soil, the heart — namely — that now owned itself a woman's. The letter continued —

“ I know the act was all his own, for I know *you*, good friend, and that you would have never humiliated me by intercession, or the like. We understood one another at once. If he be uncouth and peculiar, it is not *I* could reproach him on that score. I like his look. It is his father's, bettered. You know I had hardly seen him before this meeting, but he surprised me agreeably : he looks a soldier at any rate, and *not* a vulgar one, — and that is much. A matter of which I am about to speak had determined me to seek to conciliate him, and I had before he came advisedly taken measures to lay him under something of an obligation. I wished to secure his aid and advocacy in a scheme dear to my heart. It concerns yourself.

“ I cannot see you, Merrick, for I cannot again speak of it ; and you must go, good friend, lest I should see you ; for you have so grown to be a sort of habit of my life, that did you remain here, we

should meet, and then neither should I have opportunity to arrange as I desire, nor would you have this letter to lay before you now and then, and *think* over, which you must do.

“ Why do you let me rest your debtor ? Why do you resist the longing of your friends to serve you ? Why not be serious in replying to their wishes ? Listen, Merrick, and let these words sink into your spirit, as embodying the soul’s wish of your best friend.

“ You came among us to take refuge from a heartless world. You found in an obscure community a simple, cheerful people, the antipodes to your cold selfish islanders — cast-iron men like their own cotton-machines, venal, money-loving, mouth-valiant patriots, *parvenus* nobles, pauper-peasants, — and beneath a social varnish of seeming good, vice in a prude’s bonnet, and sin in a surplice ! — is it not so ? Well, your own genial nature warmed among this easy, happy race, save that while they laughed and thought not, you still carried heart and reflection in your merriment : this it is, in its result, that has made you dear to us : will you go back to your wintry island, a lone man, to live without a relative that loves you, among companions, your brother officers whose very necessities freeze their feelings ?

or will you return among us, and live in ease, and joy, and peace, creating perchance a home for yourself, which could be readied for you by hands that ache for such a labour? — Strive for such a home in England, Merrick; rank, title, station, interest, influence, money, — have you them? (I give you back your own picture of your own country). You have them not, and therefore cannot have the home: Merrick, it awaits you here, if you will: the useless wealth I own, useless *now*, is sacred to the reckoning of a debt of gratitude: come back among us, — gladden us with your presence; — my nephew with myself asks you to live with those for whom life has through you been created: — consent to the lot that stands obvious for your choice, and remember who it is that urges you to do so, one that hesitated not when you advised —

“I feel that I have written in these last words ungenerously; but let them go — I study to be no more to you than myself. Do not even answer this; I want you not to write of it, and then dismiss the subject from your mind.

“—— I have paused to read what I had written, and find that the subject I speak of — (my head is confused with thoughts, which I imagine my friends intuitively participate) — has, amid all I have said of

it, escaped mention. My good and faithful counsellor, Finot, my nephew, your friend, feel alike with me that there is but one way I can serve you in; they advise the offer, I entreat its acceptance. Return then among us to settle, for a time at least, and your bride's dowry is the care of your friend,

“URSULE DE MALGUET.”

The sailor fell into deep thought. When men have turned to tread the downward path of life, (a weary one often and a monotonous if they have sense without some high pursuit,) there is a vision sometimes of rest by the road side,—rest, though still the journey ceases not, of comfort and companionship in the remaining portion of the way. Such a fancy had rarely visited Merrick, who was no man for day dreams in matters which reality rendered, as in his case here, utterly visionary; but now, for the first time, the idea possessed him with some earnestness; for as it now assumed a tangible shape he did not seek to reject it.

“At any rate,” he thought, “I will return; it needed not such anxious kindly injunctions to make me do as I had pre-determined; and then—and then—as the Frenchman says, *alors comme alors*. She is a strange being, and with all her worth this eccentricity of action seems to increase upon her, and

would make all but those that know her best smile at and even pity her enthusiasm as something extravagant.”

Whether, in this particular instance, this extravagance were elicited by any peculiar latent cause beyond regard and gratitude acting on a mind full of high-flown chivalry, it never occurred to the sailor to inquire. His simple and generous nature respected, and was somewhat overawed by, the superior intellectual power, and the poetic earnestness of the lady of La Chaulautre, which placed her, with him, as in a sphere above the reach of any petty weakness; while he at the same time sympathised so naturally in the longing to confer benefit on a friend as experienced by *his* friend, that, coming more especially from her eccentric self, he failed to detect aught in it extraordinary in respect to him, or indeed in any thing remarkable beyond its possible extravagance in the eyes of the world. Yet even in this view of the question did not the worldly forethought and sagacity of the experienced lawyer sanction, nay, advise the offer made to him, upon which too the manly spirit of the dragoon set its open fiat of hearty concurrence? “The *mariage de raison* and the *mariage de convenance*,” reflected the sailor, “are national and conventional modes of adjusting the civil contract between two persons on considerations

irrespective, in the first instance, of personal attachment; two-thirds and more of the people about me are married on these terms."

Further than this, Merrick pursued not the argument. It sufficed for the present that he had accustomed himself to consider the subject practically. The moral obligation which bound him to accede to the wishes of his friends would be met, and satisfied by an endeavour so to do, the result of which would be determined by circumstances; and in this easy, happy frame of mind the sailor smiled on the world, and looked forward in his voyage of life on marriage as just such a possible accident as one which might, while sailing through the blue Pacific, either strand his vessel on a coral reef, or lay her by the green and peaceful shores of some rich islet, where love lies hid to lap the wanderer in Elysium. To him the notary was wisdom and fidelity harbouring no hidden scheme; the dragoon, his own counterpart, mastering no secret and disturbing thought, the ruling element of another's actions; the lady, high-souled, noble-minded, chivalrous, unfortunate, — a creature to serve at once, respect, and pity, — possessing, in old Chaucer's phrase —

" ————— the whole richesse
Of womanhead, and friendliness."

There be such natures, endowed with the happy competence of making the most of all, however evil, that affects themselves; and thinking the best of every thing done, thought, or planned by those they care for.

Merrick, under these impressions, strictly observed the injunction of Madame de Malguet against answering her letter. Meanwhile the care of the old notary hastened every preparative for his own departure with the friends for Paris. A handsome travelling carriage arrived in Plassy for Monsieur de La Chalautre: relays of his own horses were posted so as to take the party in two days to the metropolis: his agents communicated therefrom the lease for his use of a mansion of suitable dimensions, and the entertainment of attendants, two of whom, a valet and chasseur, came to accompany their new lord on his journey. In all these, and other multifarious matters of detail, the dragoon manifested a sort of impatient indifference, his horses being the one subject he personally interfered with on his own account. There were two points in favour of others, however, on which he insisted: the first regarded old Grivet, whose favourite crotchet, the new gunlock, was carried wholesale to completion by an advance of capital necessary for the purpose; while the second

resulted in the endowment of a professorship of English at the College of Plassy, the happy holder whereof was — need I say? — Charles Auguste Picotot, the purist in translation! Merrick, on his part, cleared accounts with La Fosse, who refused all remuneration for attendance, save the loan of *equus caballus* for his son Eugene, who settled in Plassy on his father's practice, — and thus, these and other like trifles arranged, the friends set forth for a lengthened absence from the little town.

Finot followed them. The old man's intimate acquaintance with the secret history of the family of La Chalaudre, and his knowledge of every needful form of process requisite for the establishment of the rights of its heir, were suddenly, to the surprise of all at Plassy, strengthened, as regards practical efficiency, by the return of "the fast man," Finot the younger, to his former position in his father's office. How, more especially at this time, the reconciliation could have been brought about between the incensed notary and his son, remained matter of deep mystery; this, however, was certain, that young Finot took his place at the head of the establishment during his father's absence, conducting himself with a degree of sobriety, circumspection, and ability in business, which caused

no small marvel among the lieges of the good burgh of Plassy.

So much, indeed, that it tended to mitigate the gossip upon the nine days' wonder of earlier date that touched the community less nearly. Moreover, the main actors in that short drama were gone from the scene of its events ; Merrick, for what the world knew, to return no more ; the dragoon to come back, it was true, but as a man to be more envied in his success than sympathised with by the multitude for his merited good fortune. The public works, again, by the renewal of which the joint enterprise and ingenuity of these two had benefited, not only Plassy itself, but the whole country round for leagues, were begun upon, but, as is often the case in like matters, these threatened, in the *éclat* of their execution, to crush the name of their real originators. While, therefore, according to the way of the world, the absent ones were achieving their destined oblivion, she that was left, retiring into her wonted seclusion, ceased gradually to be a prominent object of public curiosity : the rather that, being unpopular, she had disappointed the malice of the many : they could exult over no humiliation of her pride, for she was powerful and proud (to them) as ever ; while as to personal conduct the taunt of ridicule and the

tattle of scandal found no theme on which to raise a sneer or hitch a story: indeed, taking the sum of recent events, her worst ill-wishers found so much in them no man could help approving, that they mentioned her not at all, lest praise enforced should shame their hatred.

It was thus, her actions unwatched and her motives uncanvassed, that Madame de Malguet proceeded with her usual energy and determination, to carry out her project in Merrick's favour, by selecting some fair daughter of the land, fit recipient of her bounty, and meet helpmate for the kind and gentle sailor. Thus had Finot advised; thus had her nephew suggested; and, indeed, there were local circumstances which favoured her design. Mention has been made of a certain Madame de Felingue, a distant connection of the lady of La Chalaudre, who resided with her niece not far from La Tour Chalaudre in the Upper Town. She was a widow, and had long been so; her husband having perished in the war of La Vendée. Her sister and co-heiress fled in the troublous times beyond seas to Guiana with a cadet of the family of Montbazou de la Rose, with whom she had rashly made a love-match. Neither of them ever saw their native France again; but one frail and weakly infant, the offspring of their union, was

brought from Bordeaux, whither doubtless it had been sent from the far land of its birth to Plassy. The child was named *Lucrèce Montbazon de la Rose*, and succeeded to its mother's half share of the estate, yielding some eleven thousand franks a year, which *Finot's* care had, as with *La Chalaudre*, preserved to the right owners. There were unbelievers, who in private looked upon the *Guiana* story as apocryphal, alleging that the co-heiress died unmarried, with other matters, which occurring in stirring times were more or less difficult of proof. Such talk was, however, little listened to. *Madame de Felingue* was a rigidly devout and even somewhat austere personage, who brought up her niece in semi-conventual retirement. Great indeed was the interest excited among the youth of *Plassy*, respecting the secluded heiress. Few had even seen, and none had, it was supposed, ever spoken to her.

Between the guardian of this mysterious maid, and *Madame de Malguet*, there existed some community of thought and interest; for she, too, was a family genealogist, and possessed a fund of traditional lore, with which the lady loved to enlarge and illustrate her chronicle of the House of *La Chalaudre*. Continuing, ostensibly for this purpose, to reside in the Upper Town, and interchanging frequent visits with

her relative, Madame de Malguet did not cease to use all occasions of studying the character and tone of mind of her younger kinswoman, who was in person pleasing, with a look of aristocratic blood about her, that was, with the lady of La Chaulatre, a peculiar recommendation. This young lady submitted to all her guardian's whims, and they were many and hard to bear, with quiet patience; — she was cheerful, but constrained, and to any show of kindness cold as ice. There seemed, however, to Madame de Malguet as though a soul and sense ought to exist in that fair, tall, quiet girl, whose downcast eye was not always destitute of intelligence; while a shade of what seemed thought would sometimes flit across the usually unruffled brow, as if the mind were wandering away beyond the high garden walls that held the young recluse's melancholy world.

Calling one morning earlier than ordinary, half determined to feel her way upon the delicate ground that lay between her and her much-meditated object, Madame de Malguet found the aunt and niece at breakfast. The rich aroma of the mocha berry perfumed the apartment, combating possession of its atmosphere with the appetising flavour of an omelette *aux herbes fines*; likewise of a certain stew which a silver saucepan guarded, hotly and savourily, from

air external and from curious eye. The appurtenances of these viands occupied one extremity of an oblong table, at which sat Madame de Felingue. At the other end sat the fair Lucrèce,—the snow white cloth before her sparingly covered. One of those long-shaped loaves, in which the soul of the French peasant delighteth, a dish of medlars, and a caraffe of spring water, rebuked, in hermit-like antithesis, the epicurean delicacies of the elder lady. She rose, on Madame de Malguet's entry, in some confusion; for she bore the reputation (and she knew it) of being selfish and penurious, and of course her first object was to repel an imputation which present appearances supported.

“Nay, come in, dear cousin,” she said, seeing her visitor about to retire; “with you we are on no ceremony. You have breakfasted, you say; oh yes, of course, you are so early. I am not at all sorry you have surprised us, in order that you may see how carefully, even in the smallest particular, that dear child has been brought up. Are the medlars good, my child?”

“Yes, aunt,” replied the fair Lucrèce to this incidental question, as she took another of the fruit from the dish, “will our cousin try their flavour?”

Madame de Malguet thought the child-like *naïveté* of the grown young woman a little overdone.

“She is so fond of them,” interposed Madame de Felingue; “and, indeed, of all simple things. I have cultivated that taste in her; for—” and here the voice dropped into the *coshering* tone in which old ladies talk of things young ones may not listen to.

“Indeed,” answered Madame de Malguet, aloud, “bread and fruit and water only.”

“*Rien qui échauffe*; the rest of the diet regulated on the same system. At dinner a little soup, lentils, haricots, simple vegetables wholesomely dressed, and pure water, pure plain water.”

“Do not doctors say that weakens the stomach?” rejoined her amused auditress, citing a popular French impression.

“A mistake, a decided mistake! Besides—” and here the voice fell again into a lengthened whisper.

“And is my fair kinswoman,” at last inquired Madame de Malguet, “to live all her life like a little recluse?”

There was a tremulous motion of the young girl’s downcast eyelids, as if the blood that coursed through their net-work of blue veins sought to sign, at any rate, its negative of the idea. Madame de Felingue

hemmed, bridled up, looked an expressive look, worthy the goddess (if there be one) of Silence, at her relative, and told Lucrèce to send the servants for the breakfast things. The fair demure one heaved the shadow of a sigh, and glided primly from the chamber.

Then ensued a conversation which soon terminated according to Madame de Malguet's wishes. Her cousin, who was a *devotée* and a miser, desired only to enjoy her hoardings in this world, and leave them, when she departed for another, to the Church, instead of adding them, as she should have done, to her niece's dower. When, therefore, the lady of La Chalautre proposed to arrange herself for the young lady's establishment in life, assigning her a sum at any rate equivalent to those savings as the price of the privilege, she offered welcome terms to willing ears, and took her leave, overpowered with a flood of phrases expressive of the devotee's regard and affection.

She was, herself, glad at heart of this step in advance.

"The girl is of my blood," she thought, as she stepped down the stairs, which terminated, as in her own house, in a wide, low entrance hall, "and if *he* like her not, 'tis but some forty thousand francs

laid out, and that not ill. I hardly like her though; and there is but one other worthy to be named by birth or bringing up as his wife here; let me try to follow up one success by ——”

She had descended at her own leisure, and with the light, uncertain footstep of one in deep thought (for in that penurious household there were no menials to wait on her exit) to within three or four steps of the bottom of the stairs, when her hand, that rested on the oaken balustrade, came suddenly in contact with that of another person. Starting, she looked, and saw the little sun-burnt fingers of some person under age—their owner hidden unseen beneath the stair—which held up a diminutive, carefully-folded note for her acceptance; a boy's voice at the same time repeated, in a rapid whisper—

“ *Vite, mam'selle ! mais prenez !* ”

The tone of it struck her as something she had heard before; a sort of ominous tremor ran through her frame; she snatched the note, descended the stairs suddenly, and, turning, beheld ensconced below them the sailor's servant boy, Michel.

In sleep, when one is fevered, and the diseased imagination magnifies its power until time and space begin to wane before it, ten seconds will suffice for the dreamy events of years. In our waking hours

the mind, strongly and suddenly shocked, falls in a less degree into the same preternatural facility, and grasps at a thought, motives, and their results, with the whole history of their dependent contingencies. This, too, is a momentary disease. With Madame de Malguet the fit was a severe one. It was jealousy. When she recovered her self-possession she found herself holding by the high-carved post, surmounted after the ancient fashion by the family crest which terminated the balustrade. Her first relieving thought was almost spoken aloud —

“But he has been away for weeks!”

She collected herself, and looked around. At another time the figure she perceived might have well provoked a smile: — Michel in agonies of alarm at the lady's illness, and of embarrassment lest by it his presence should be betrayed. The boy swung his arms behind him, and danced noiselessly from foot to foot with a convulsive motion of the jaws and lips as if painfully subduing the involuntary shout.

“Be quiet, fool,” she said sternly; “what do you here?”

“I thought you were Mam'selle Lucrèce, madame. She comes down every day with just such a cautious step, and so I held it up as usual.”

“As usual! And who sends these daily notes?”

“Monsieur Adolphe.”

“Young Finot?”

“He, madame; he’s waiting for Mam’selle Lucrèce under what they call the Prior’s yew,—that big tree in the garden corner.”

“And why are you not in Paris?”

“Oh! André is gone with the Captain, and I stayed to take care of the dogs, and master’s horse that he lent to Monsieur Eugene, the doctor’s son; and so Monsieur Eugene lent me to Monsieur Adolphe to take his notes.”

“Since when?”

“About three weeks ago I took the first one.”

“And the answers?”

“I wait for them by the big yew, just where Monsieur Adolphe climbs the wall, and Mam’selle throws them over kneaded into a lump of bread-crumbs.”

The lady almost smiled when she thought of the eminent advantages derived from strict confinement and a medlar diet.

“Go, child,” she said; “say you have given this note; I will take care the young lady gets it, — and that you bring no more; no tears, — you are forgiven — begone.”

She wrapped her shawl about her, and hurried home, whence ('twas not eighty yards off) she had come alone. Then, thinking much of the strange fatality which so favoured the sailor's foe, while it wrecked at once her wishes and his fortunes, she ordered the carriage, and proceeded with her usual promptitude to the Lower Town.

It was before the door of the notary that the vehicle stopped, — a spot at which of late the citizens had observed it often. These visits indeed had become so common, that young Finot, supported by a happy combination of natural effrontery and professional assurance, had gradually advanced on each occasion a step further towards the re-establishment of what he called "his relations" with his father's wealthy and honoured client. Among that lady's few weaknesses might be classed the favour with which she tolerated a show of deferential attention; and the "fast man" knew it well; but it was by no means on this alone that he relied; nor were the relations which he had ultimately in view by any means confined, as has been seen, to the female head of the family alone. The truth is, that during the period of his disgrace this ingenious person had, by accident, materially tended to the furtherance of a project of his father's. Debarred alike of occupation

and amusement, in the office or the billiard room, he had applied his energies successfully in a quarter we wot of. Supported by documentary proof of his good understanding with the heiress, he made his way boldly one day into his father's presence, explained his position, and respectfully demanded definite information as to the rentals, assets, estates, and havings of his future wife, and the aunt whose possessions she would inherit. This occurred about the period at which Madame de Malguet had first hinted her design respecting the sailor, with regard to whom the notary had had reason, as we are aware, to imbibe most favourable impressions. Now Finot the elder, in his quality of man of many revolutions, looked forth upon the times, and saw in them, beneath the deceitful lull of seeming quiet, the seeds and signs of coming events. He was heartily and sincerely attached to his wife and daughter, and most fixedly convinced that his son, clever fellow and selfish scamp, would, in the event of fresh revolutions in France, risk the ruin of his family (the notary being supposed to be no more) to advance his own interests, and, if compromised, abandon the nearest of his blood rather than endure the burthen of supporting them in misfortune. Merrick, a cosmopolite, destitute in France of political bias, po-

pular with high and low, and of the most ingenuous honour, presented himself at the very moment when this anxious foreboding sorely beset him. To encourage his son in his secret relations with Madame de Malguet's kinswoman,—to urge the lady to the selection of a bride for Merrick on the spot, and prompt the easy temper of the dragoon to do so too (who in his soul thought Merrick would woo the full moon ere he dreamed of marriage),—to point out even the most eligible quarter, (that, namely, in which he knew there existed an insuperable obstacle, with the certainty that his own daughter, as also of kin to La Chalaute through her mother, would, for this independently of other reasons, be, on its discovery, next in the lady's thoughts),—and lastly, to set forth, in all the zeal of a devoted servant of the house, to Paris, whence he would in due course return to have his consent wrung from him to his child's marrying a foreigner,—all this was to the wily and astute old man a succession of most simple combinations. Their eventual happy out-turn, however, depending a good deal on the fidelity of Monsieur Adolphe, his pardon and re-establishment in the office became imperative,—favours which were accorded to him as such, without a hint of the value of his involuntary service being given to him.

Hardly acknowledging this gentleman's mute and humble greeting with a nod of grave indifference, Madame de Malguet ascended the stairs to Madame Finot's *salon*, where mother and daughter were both seated. The room which they occupied offered no more violent a contrast to that one the lady had so lately left in the Upper Town, than did to one another the several occupants of the respective chambers themselves. Madame Finot was a voluble, laughter-loving, full-blown matron of some six-and-forty; — her daughter, a blooming girl of nineteen, her features agreeable, and her somewhat exuberant figure tamed into symmetry by the art and elegance of Parisian dress; — if that, indeed, could be ever elegant, in which the incipient monstrosity of *gigot* sleeves and the gaudy rainbow-hood of *Jocko* ribbons shone pre-eminent. The apartment was as bright and gay as handsome curtains, glass, ormolu, and porcelain, artificial flowers, birds, and winter sunshine, pretty chairs, and useless tables could make it. — I forget, — one table was kept for use, and at it the younger lady sat writing, while her mother worked and talked beside the wood fire. Madame de Malguet eyed the scene with some complacency, and thought of Merrick's future home.

Meanwhile great was the gratulation of the de-

lighted mistress of the house over her visitor's arrival ; for she had so much to tell of " how Monsieur de La Chalaudre's cause was going on, and of his reception at court, which she was *sure* nobody had taken the trouble of writing to Madame de Malguet, — and of how the women called him '*le noble cuirassier*,' and the men imitated the curl of his moustache ; and of his horses, and of his riding, which even the English admired ; — and, by the bye, talking of English, *ce bon Monsieur de Merrick* ! think of his retiring into the back ground, and no where on pretence of his wound, but really because of his poverty ; and he will not, Finot says, take a fraction as a loan, nor so much as a horse as a present from his friend, — think of that ! — Oh, Amelie there knows a good deal about Monsieur de Merrick from a nice English girl that was at school with her in Paris, — the daughter of Monsieur de Merrick's admiral."

Here Madame de Malguet looked inquisitively round ; Amelie was busy writing.

" Aye — its all very well her pretending to write ; but she is by no means so indifferent to all the stories one hears of his goodness, and bravery, and modesty too," — (had the lady had her cue from her husband ?) — " indeed what more natural than that she should like the English ? — *moi, je les adore*, — and never can

say how happy I am that at the dear Emperor's last victory — *ou ça ? — ah ! oui, Ouaterlin ;* — the poor English were able to retreat, and leave those abominable Prussians to be killed, till our poor dear French were so tired they could fight no more, and thus positively conquered themselves with the very weight of their own glory ! ”

Madame de Malguet took advantage of the pause at this climax to ask the young lady if she knew Captain Merrick. The girl looked up with a startled expression ; but before she could speak the mother interposed — “ Oh no — not in the English sense of the word, — know him as an acquaintance, but just slightly to bow to in a ball-room : for though I have the greatest respect and admiration for the English system in a school, — free discussion, unreserved feeling, expansion of the heart, opening of the mind, and all that sort of thing, — and in all this my Amelie has been brought up, — yet when it comes to one's own daughter out of school, so long as she is unmarried, you know one would not like to see her talking and walking with people, as I am credibly informed is the result of the English system with girls in England ! — But, talking of that, what think you of the English running hand ? is it not delightful ? — such an improvement on our crabbed old

fashioned style,—and Amelie's is exquisite writing,—so unconfined, so free;" and with that, her bright eyes beaming with all a mother's pride, she whisked from the writing table the letter-sheet that lay before her daughter, and, as she bent to kiss her forehead, handed the paper to Madame de Malguet, saying it was a letter to her father.

The lady took the thickly-written page, and glanced carelessly at the first two lines. They ran thus :—

"No, Eugene, no!—be not unjust!—it is false, oh, it is false! the Englishman is to me as nothing, and ——"

"Well," exclaimed the bustling, happy mother, "is it not exquisitely free?"

"As freely written as any thing I have ever seen, and as distinctly," answered Madame de Malguet with a sigh that was half a groan;—"but see! your daughter!"

The poor girl's hands had fallen on her knees,—her head upon her bosom,—she was fainting.

While Madame Finot screamed, and called for aid, and held the sinking girl upon her chair, the lady of La Chalaute dropped the tell-tale page upon the embers, and saw it burned to ashes. Then turning abruptly, she aided, with no feminine dexterity, in

slacking bands and laces, and all the prison-house of female attire, under which operation, with the help of one or two frightened maid servants that rushed into the room, the sufferer slowly recovered.

The first words that reached her ears were from the lips of Madame de Malguet.

“Heavens! what awkwardness! in very alarm I have let Amelie’s beautiful copper-plate letter drop in the fire and burn!”

Two swimming eyes uplifted to her face thanked her with an expression of ineffable gratitude.

“But let this be a lasting lesson,” continued the lady, with meaning in her tone.

“Against what, good cousin?” inquired Madame Finot.

“Over-heated rooms, cousin,” was the reply, “and perfumes, and tight-lacing.”

“Ah! yes, indeed,” observed the system-smitten mother,” shaking her head, “that is, I am afraid, one drawback on the English scheme — they are too tight-laced.”

“Of course — and only see! since her dress is easier the dear child looks another being! come, give me your arm down stairs, Amelie, — the frosty air will revive you, and I will explain all the evils of

tight corsets to you as we go, even to their effect on the action of the heart."

The young girl, with a charming air of maidenly trustfulness, at once confiding and submissive, kissed the thin hand which she drew beneath her rounded arm, and pressed it against her bosom: then, the lady's greetings with her mother done, she led the way towards the door, without a sign of vexation, or the angry pouting of abashment, which the last speaker's cut might have provoked in either look or manner.

"She has temper, poor child," thought Madame de Malguet, as they descended the stair in silence, "temper and self-command; but why this clandestine correspondence — and with so good a mother?" At the foot of the stair-case, the door of the notary's anti-chamber standing half open seemed to invite their entrance. Closing it upon them, the lady took the nearest chair, while Amelie sinking on the floor at her feet hid her face like a child in the folds of her dress, and, unasked, poured forth her confession. It was the old story; — she had known Eugene La Fosse from infancy; when they were children she was always called his "little wife," — when in Paris she used to see him every Sunday with her brother in the parlour of the *pension*, — she had been always taught that marriages were made for love, and as she loved Eugene why —

(and there a pause with many tears) — but now mamma had more than hinted something about *ce bon Monsieur de Merrick*. — “I know he is good, and your true friend, dear cousin,” the poor girl added, “but all my life I have taught myself to love Eugene, and how — oh ! how marry another man !”

Madame de Malguet sighed, and pressed the penitent’s hand. Something within her whispered sympathy with the youthful sufferer, while, at the same time, looking at the English system as opposed to the medlar one, she could not help reflecting that, in so far as the guidance of young women’s inclinations was concerned there was little indeed, to choose between them. Her thoughts wandered to the sailor, and, for a time, she sat silent in the cold anti-room with the girl weeping in her lap, oblivious alike of place and position. At length, starting from her reverie with an impulse that startled and half scared her companion, she exclaimed —

“It must be, Annechet, after all.”

“Who, cousin ?” asked the girl.

“My child,” answered Madame de Malguet, with one of her abrupt transitions, “women should love truly, but they should be true. This Eugene that you speak of abetted your brother in revenging himself on my friend, for reasons you may have heard ; I

am not one, however, that bears malice or ill-will. I will see this young man, and your brother also, and all of you shall have cause to know me for your friend. Promise me, only, to tell your mother the truth, and that done, I promise you the wish of your ——”

Tearing herself from the still tearful embrace of Amelie, the lady, twice baffled, returned in deep reflection to her home. She had read that day the secret of two young hearts, and felt more than ever that there was a long chapter in the first book of woman's life, which the pen of destiny had omitted to write in her own. Intercalated too late, when the volume was crushed and ruffled, it showed offensively, and injured instead of adorning. In that case, why did that nature, which is all beauty, order, and fitness, demand the intercalation, and to what end?

It was a question she could not answer.

CHAPTER V.

THE rugged months of the year had done their stern and stormy office, teaching in their passage that ills in this world be both useful and necessary. March winds had blustered, and April showers gushed over the land; May had brought in the nightingale, and vanished in the blush of her beauty amid song and flowers; it was the month of leafy June, who bore her ripening honours that same year so sultrily, that men thought she would almost anticipate the season, and bring in apple-bearing autumn ere there had been a summer. The heat was so unusual and excessive, that the Marquis de la Chalautre and his friend Captain Merrick, decided upon travelling from Paris in the coolness of a moonlight night, in place of braving the dust and heat of the *pavé* by day. About four leagues before you get to Plassy, there is a pleasant little village, a short way off the road, which, as if bargaining politely with the world for the integrity of its utter retirement, would seem to have deputed one of its houses to the road-side to do

duty as inn, and thus, absorbing wayfarers during their transient passage, keep the foot of the stranger from the homestead of the lowly community.

Both inn and village belonged to La Chalaudre, and by them turned off the cross road which, passing through Fourebois, led direct to the chateau. It was the route, the reader may remember, taken by Ronsin's troop when they sacked the place with circumstances of such horror; in former days a road peculiarly the right of the seigneurs of that ancient domain, and now, again, by the jealous semi-antiquarian care of old Josse, re-elevated to its proper honours of passability. Reaching the little inn about sunrise, the travellers changed their dress, and took some slight refreshment, with that loitering enjoyment of leisure which those best appreciate who have passed an early life of toil and privation. The Marquis's own horses were harnessed to the britzka, and amid the reverences, deep and low, of the tenantry and labourers gathered to greet their lord, the two resumed their journey.

Prosperity had altered the dragoon as little as might be. He bore his honours well and loftily, as became the man, but with nothing of *parvenu* assumption. He had undergone the favour of a Court, and endured the adulation of nobles, in their way the

ablest sycophants, without any perceptible change in his habits or his manners. So far the man was different, that all shade of moodiness had vanished from him; he was, as of old, taciturn, but without moroseness; and the expression of his features, lightened of their load of care, was that of quiet reflection, tempered by the seemly gravity of a soldier who had seen and suffered much. His friend was in appearance a good deal changed. The interval of a few months had sufficed for his perfect recovery from his wound; the hurt had, however, intermediately shown signs of an unfavourable character, which prolonged his period of suffering. This it was, doubtless, that had reduced the full-formed figure, imparted a worn and anxious look occasionally to the features, and interspersed the still crisply-curling hair with shades of grey, more dominant there than years alone would justify. In temper and in spirits, he was the same as ever; or, perhaps, even the latter rose now and then to a pitch of exuberance, as drinking in health with every breath of the pure air through which they rapidly moved, enjoying all the bliss of the fresh morning, gladdened by the society of his friend and the sight of his happiness, the convalescent sank the sum of his own cares in the genial satisfaction of the moment. The country Merrick saw un-

der a new aspect, the most favourable one for a wide expanse of cultivated champaign land; it was loaded with waving crops of ripening grain, that as they rustled in the gentle breeze, which peasants say the rising sun brings with him, hardly allowed the slanting rays time to cast prismatic light along their dewy ears, ere with capricious nod they cast their liquid diamonds from them in a mimic shower.

“ You came in to Paris so late yesterday, and we started so early, and I slept so sound last night, *mon brave*,” said the dragoon, as he settled himself in the carriage, “ that I have not had clearly your own account of yourself; and in the first place, *que diable*, why did you not come over to head quarters, — to Rouen that is, — two months ago?”

“ Why, I wrote to you.”

“ You did, you did — pardon me. I never write, and forget that other people do; but still if your wound did break out again, *raison de plus* for coming to a healthy climate!”

“ So it would seem; but having once gone over to Bally —— ”

“ Thankye — yes — in Ireland, I know — the place with the name.”

“ Being there,” continued the sailor laughing, “ I might blame their moist climate, but I could not hurt

their warm hearts; — and when I did get away, I was delayed in London — indeed, I hung on there till the last moment that my engagement with you permitted.”

“ Admiralty again ? ”

“ Again.”

“ Any hope ? ”

The sailor sighed slightly, and looked away across the rich landscape. There was a short silence.

“ You are right, *mon brave*, I believe,” at last observed the dragoon gravely; — “ you are right to make every struggle to place yourself independently of all or any one; but, *palsambleu!* among your knot of fresh-water aristocrats yonder, the man that sues too long, and too much, must endure a humiliating amount of dependence before he gets his right; now I doubt that’s being wholesome for one: I told you as much ere we parted at Rouen.”

“ And what say you to the dependence that my good friends here would place me in ? ” asked Merrick with a slight smile.

The road for a quarter of a mile or so, had run through a wood of some size, known as the Forêt de Fourebois. They emerged, as the sailor spoke, into the open country beyond it, a plain of great fertility watered by the same stream that in its later course

passed through Plassy, which interposed its breadth of corn and meadow between the woodland and the considerable village through which the travellers were to pass. The ruins of Chateau Fourebois towered on their eminence high above the little burgh, blackened with fire, and desolate, but picturesque in the distance; while, as if to make amends for this reminiscence of war and havoc, a country house of the humbler order, with its garners and farmstead peeped on their right from amid the dark elms that sheltered, and half concealed it.

“Look, Merrick!” exclaimed the soldier, “would the owner of such a place as that be much of a dependant, think you? — Gods, what a country!” continued he, apostrophising the fair land with a vehemence unusual to him on such a subject, — “rations for an army within the glance of the eye, and not half a mile unfit for a charge of cavalry!”

Amused with this military idea of the picturesque, the sailor laughed and turned the conversation, not however without being inwardly more reconciled than heretofore to the scheme his friends had sketched out for his future life. As they approached nearer and nearer to their destination, their talk reverted to matters connected with its owner. Merrick learned, with more detail than could be conveyed

in a brief conversation the previous night, that his friend's right and title to the marquise was to be formally acknowledged within a month — that until assured of this he had refused steadily all invitations direct or indirect to visit La Chalaudre, and further, that he would not now have done so but in Merrick's company.

“By the way,” inquired the dragoon, “have you had letters while away from the lady yonder?”

“Madame de Malguet? — two only since I saw her last; the first was written before I left Plassy, the second reached me about a month ago; it was very brief, simply enjoining me to meet you on a certain day in Paris for the purpose of this journey; it was written lest, she said, you might forget to remind me; — but you did so.”

“My adjutant did: I signed the letter. The lady said nothing of any person with her?”

“Not a word; any one staying with her you mean? — is there such?”

“Some relative of her husband's — a Belgian girl.”

“Is that all about her?” asked the sailor; “you are not wont to be so uncommunicative.”

“Nor you to be so curious, *mon brave*,” rejoined the dragoon, with a peculiar smile; “but I know

nothing of her from the lady. You remember old Van Loken at Rouen?"

"The old *chef d'escadron* with the sabre wound on his cheek?—Of course.—Well?"

"He is a Bruges man, and knows old stories of the Malguet family: 'twas he heard of this young lady leaving her convent."

"Her convent!"

"She was bred up in one it seems, having been left an orphan; the last but her, of the Malguets, was the superioress, and took the little creature in—(this is all Van Loken's story which he told me *à propos* of hearing from his people, as a bit of local news, that the young lady had gone to La Chalaudre);—well, the superioress died, and when the time came, the lay-sister she had left to the community, would not take the veil, and there was some talk of persecution, and a rumour of the girl's having written to the lady yonder, who removed her from the convent; there was some scandal about it at Bruges, Van Loken says, as they are desperate pater noster people, are the Belgians."

"A romance, in short," said Merrick.

"*Au diable* with romance!" replied the Marquis gaily, lighting his ninth segar, — he having adopted this more tolerable substitute for the soldier's pipe,—

“*au diable* I say with castles in the air, romantic heroines, nuns, sentiment, persecution, *et tout le tremblement*! I was always an advocate for the actual, and so, — as you know the country, my good friend, I’ll trouble you to show me my chateau when we chance to stumble on it, for at the smart rate these fellows have been driving, we must surely not have far to go. Oh! my dear Merrick,” he added, “it is a terrible thing this same acquisition! I feel myself almost hankering after the things of the earth, now I own so large a share of it!”

“And to go on in the same moral strain,” answered the sailor, “you afford a pitiable exposition of the blindness of worldly men, ‘searching for they know not what,’ since you ask me where your wealth lies! — but, without a jest, I know that your ignorance of La Chalaudre is but the natural result of another want of knowledge that you are vexed with, — not knowing how to break a promise.”

The soldier looked grave again at the incidental allusion to his mother, and both were silent while Merrick taxed his recollection with such land-marks as might tell him where he was, too proud professionally to ask of his whereabouts: nor did he need to do so. The road which for a league had skirted a low range of vine-grown hills, now stretched on

before them up the acclivity, and topped the brow of the rising ground, descending doubtless into the valley beyond. The sailor at once remembered the spot whence he had himself first approached La Chalaudre, and recollecting the favourable point of view it offered, suggested to his friend that they should alight, and cross the hill on foot.

“The very thing I could have wished,” was the reply; “you know, *mon brave*, the trouble I took to avoid the *éclat* of a public reception from these good people, of which the lady yonder would not have bated me one inch; hence our stolen march last night with pretext of the heat to gain twelve hours on them; — but see yonder, and trust the eye of an old dragoon, — they have positively posted a vidette on the rising ground up there! the fellow spies us, takes up a hole in his girths — ah! you’ll ride hard, friend, will ye? — one more look at the carriage, — he mounts, — he’s off! Let’s escape, good friend, before the whole mounted vassalhood is down upon us! *Halte*, you postilion, and you, sirs,” addressing the servants in the rumble, “tell any one that asks you, that your masters have gone on before.”

Guided by the sailor, the Marquis made his first progress across his own property, its direction from

the road the same, almost exactly, as that on which his leader had chanced, close on a year before, while wandering, a stranger, through the country. Turning to the dragoon as he reached the brow of the hill, Merrick pointed with extended arm, his heart too full for speech, in the direction of the chateau. The scene, strange to say, was new to both of them, for the wintry aspect under which Merrick last had seen it, bore hardly a more striking contrast to the rich verdure of its summer dress than did the present altered semblance of the building to the ruin and desolation which then rested on and about it. And yet no such time had elapsed as to admit of any very material change in the body of the place itself. There was evidently a spirit, apart materiality, which had thrown its graceful influence upon the little valley, and thus elicited the latent beauties there, its natural kindred. The accessories to a general effect had all been made available; the little mere, for instance, freed from marshy sedge and melancholy rushes, had its blue expanse unbroken, save by the buoyant water-lily, while in its centre a pair of the lordliest of birds —

“ Float double, swan and shadow.”

From the very water's brink the turf rose smooth

and even, and beyond it the ruined garden, that lately lay beneath the chateau, restored with admirable taste in the style of its first design, carried on the eye to the terrace extending along the front of the mansion, which, with its Italian double-stair of access, was, balustrade and all, repaired and recreated. The mansion itself had been restored, and all that remained complete of it rendered habitable : while the left wing, although still kept a mere shell, had been so ingeniously deprived of every sign of violence and ruin, that a stranger would rather think the caprice or penury of the owner had arrested the building in its progress, than that devastation had reduced the perfected work to that condition of incompleteness. The unsightly out-offices, needless since the restoration of the chateau, had been replaced by a range of green-houses, on which the workmen were still busy ; while far away in the deep forest above the chateau, more than one extensive vista had been opened out, the most remarkable of which exposed to view the ruins of the old stronghold of La Chalaudre. Equal care had been manifested in the approach to the modern chateau as in all else, young trees having been planted to reform the once stately avenue, which already, so large were they at their time of transplantation, gave pro-

mise of the effect that doubtless they made good in riper years.

Merrick gazed in ineffable surprise on the prospect ; but when his eye had, as he thought, taken in all the principal points worthy of observation, he turned with no less curious look to watch their result upon his companion. The dragoon had coolly sat himself upon a large stone, the boundary mark of some of the vineyards they were among, and with his cane between his teeth surveyed his chateau as critically as though it had been an enemy's position. He spoke not, so that the sailor at last, with a show of some impatience, tried to extort an opinion from him.

" Well," said he, " friend, not a word. How find you the place after all ?"

" *C'est bien*," was the muttered reply, given in the tone on which a person indifferent to the arts would express his approbation of a tolerable picture.

" No more ?" said Merrick, piqued and disappointed.

" A great deal more ; or, indeed, as much more as you wish, *mon brave*," replied the imperturbable dragoon. " I remember a place I saw in Italy, near Lodi, so like this, that it seems as if the scene yonder were not new to me. I remember, strange

enough, is it not, wishing the place were mine, and the recollection of my feelings a score of years ago has come back upon me with the sight of yonder wood and water, house and hill. No, Merrick, I was wrong in confounding the desire to acquire with pleasure in possession of a thing. I possessed all I wanted, actually or in immediate prospect, before you showed me that fair place there, with so much exultation on the kindly face of you, good friend."

With that the Colonel smiled in contented satisfaction, and re-addressed himself to the Beresina trumpet march.

"On my soul," exclaimed Merrick, "did I not know you incapable of affectation, you would go very nigh to provoke me; I verily believe you are about the one landed proprietor on earth that would come to take possession, and find his estates a superfluity. Lord and owner of some of the fairest and most fertile acres in the land, you sit there thinking old thoughts and humming old tunes, and swearing you already possessed — what, forsooth!"

"Rank, Merrick, name, title, honour, distinction, and the hope of more to come; employment, and, for fortune, the sufficient havings of a gentleman, and with these a man and a soldier has his utmost. On the other side the valley there lies wealth, and

care stares me in the face directly the visible presence of that wealth is set before my eyes, out of every window in the building. When the lady yonder," as he continued to designate Madame de Malguet, "is gone, how am I, while living, to look to the economy of the wide lands of La Chalaudre, and, when dead, to whom will they revert?"

The sailor was about to make reply, when his companion directed his attention to a new object in the landscape, situated towards the upper extremity of the valley, whither Merrick, engrossed by his friend and the chateau alternately, had not, as yet, looked. Above the wood in which lay the site of the little church of St. Ursule des Fonds, arose a spire, unfinished, but rapidly approaching its completion. The masons could be distinguished busily engaged on their hallowed labour, while as the friends looked on, more than one block of stone was slung up with crane and pulley, and laid in its destined position. There was something in the quiet activity of the distant figures that gave life to the whole scene, while the nature of their occupation spoke pleasingly to the soul of peace in the land, and of a people that feared God.

"I am glad she had that commenced upon so early," the sailor observed, half speaking to himself.

“ A church, is't not ? ”

“ *The* church, my friend.”

“ Where the priest was killed ? ” hastily rejoined the dragoon ; and then, without waiting for an answer — “ Take me there—I feel I owe the place a pilgrimage.”

Merrick led the way along the hill side, and then across the deep ravine. They walked fast and in silence, until, disengaging themselves from the broken ground, they entered the wood. There the coolness of the narrow shady path, the softness of its sward, invited slower progress, so that without sound of footfall they moved on, hearing from time to time light-hearted laughter, a snatch of song, or the louder-toned order of some master workman coming from the direction of the little church. The copse was, however, so thick, the path so tortuous, that the eye could distinguish neither building nor builders, until just where the foot-way emerged upon the open ground, the friends, half hidden still amid the trees, were arrested by the appearance of a group as picturesque as peculiar.

The centre figure, seen by them in profile, was that of a young and singularly graceful woman, seated on a low bank, and turning somewhat sideways to the left, so that her right knee almost

touched the ground. She was engaged in tracing in black paint, on a massive oblong block of stone, which one in the garb of a mason supported slantingly before her, some pattern or design, which she seemed to copy from a sketch book held for her by a venerable personage in priest's cassock, who stood a little to her left. Behind her were a lackey in full livery and a page, in whom the sailor recognised Nicolas, and his own boy, Michel, bearing severally a portfolio, and some article of female drapery; while on the right of the fair artist, but not so placed as to interrupt the view of her, stood two figures, easily recognisable as old Josse and Pierrefeu, the keeper, who, attired professionally and leaning on his gun, seemed to have recently achieved some of the practice of his calling, for, cast on the sward with something of an air to effect, lay two magpies, whose career of mischief had been but lately cut short. It is difficult to describe the charm that hung around the central figure. The lackey's cane used as a resting-staff, the coarse painter's brush that misbecame her small and rosy hand, showed evidently that the task, be what it may, was undertaken extempore; and every now and then, as she turned to replenish her brush from the painter's cruse beside her, and then with a placid smile looked up to the old priest

before she resumed her occupation, there was an infantine air of pleased success, as if the work had been begun a little in defiance of opinion. As she leaned forward in her work, her figure, although hidden from throat to heel in an ample dress of pearl grey muslin, confined by a black waistband after the fashion since called *la blouse*, did not fail to betray, in that elongated attitude, its graceful sinuosities, while one foot, seen beyond the hem of the dress, as it escaped from such a small black sabot, as half in sport, ladies would then in the country sometimes wear—gave most sufficient bail for unseen symmetry. A broad straw hat, confined beneath the chin by a black ribbon, impeded the friends in obtaining a full view of the artist's features.

The group around her maintained a perfect silence, watching intently the progress of her work, till, when at last, finishing the design as it appeared without further reference to her sketch by a few bold and masterly touches, she rose lightly to her feet, there was a sort of murmur of approbation among the attentive bystanders.

“There, good father!” said a voice of singular melody; “when at dear sister Anastasia's desire I copied those fair pinnacles into my sketch book from Notre Dame of Bruges, I little thought they would

serve so good a work as to help in decorating another sacred place, however humble !”

“However humble, dear daughter,” repeated the ecclesiastic ; “yet still re-edified *ad majorem Dei gloriam*.”

The young woman bowed her head meekly and crossed herself, while the humbler members of the party, hearing the Latin sonorously intonated, thought it was a prayer, and took their hats off—all, except the mason, who, being perhaps irreverently educated, gazed practically on the stone with its elaborate design the while, which he had now propped in its inclined position, and asked for more instructions.

In showing the workman how to chisel out according to her design, which, drawn on one side of the block, might be repeated by measurement on the other, the taper pinnacle which was to serve as model for the corner ornaments of the little Gothic, but truly Gothic, building, the face of the fair speaker turned full upon the spot in which the Marquis, as well as Merrick, stood gazing on, as by a kind of infatuation. A high and noble forehead, straight eyebrows strongly marked, eyes of light blue, soft in expression as the dove’s, formed the most striking features of a countenance whose general charm was

not to be understood by an analysis of its component elements. The mouth was small and well shaped, the nose delicately aquiline, the contour of the face a graceful oval, yet all this was forgotten in the look of that fair creature. The confiding innocence of a child, incorporate in a mould as perfect as Apelles could have given to the ideal of womanhood, was what so strongly impressed and fascinated in this peculiar being—child morally of a virgin sisterhood, whose beatific smile was the brightness of purity, whose mild eyes beamed with the love of seraphs.

The quick-sighted and wary priest was the first of the party whose attention detached itself from the detail of the good work in hand, so as to enable him to take cognisance of intruders; instead, however, of himself intermeddling with the new comers, he pointed out their presence to the steward, and left him to take such course with them as his office or his prudence authorised. Great, however, was the good man's surprise, when he perceived not Josse alone, but all persons on the spot, down to the meanest workman, gather gradually about the individuals whose clandestine appearance he had mistrusted, and with obeisances warmly offered, each after its sort, welcome them to a place where they were expected. On a sudden, room was made by Josse and Pierrefeu

through the little crowd, as the dragoon, yielding to his distaste for popular scenes, sought to announce himself, or be announced, to the higher personages present, and, with them, escape from that republican actuality of mixed popular intercourse, of which he, like many other military republicans, stood in no small dread. He advanced, his head uncovered, with much, nay, for him, unusual deference, towards the fair architect, and, in his abrupt brief manner, said—

“Pardon our unpremeditated intrusion, mademoiselle, but I am, *faute de mieux*, Marquis de la Chaulautre by title, and with my friend here, the English captain, whom I need not name, as guide, was on my way to visit a spot which I rejoice to find your pious care is about to re-hallow.”

“*Ad majorem Dei gloriam!*” muttered the clergyman.

Crossing herself at the words, the fair devotee replied, with her calm sweet nun’s smile—

“I am glad to know you, sir, although you have spoiled our *fête* by arriving some hours too soon, I must say; and in you, also, Monsieur le Capitaine,” she added, addressing Merrick, “I am happy to make the acquaintance of an esteemed friend of my kind relatives.”

She spoke with a modest freedom, as one unfettered

by the prurient conventionalities of continental society in those days, and in the natural dignity of innocence. If the dragoon were astonished at this vision of a female being other than he had ever seen or pictured one to be, the sailor, on the other hand, was charmed by a manner which one of our pleasant island fictions attributes as distinctive of the unmarried women of England.

“The Marquis,”—here interposed the ecclesiastic, who had reserved a separate reverence and a separate effect for himself—“The Marquis, my daughter, spoke of a visit to our chapel;—we should not interrupt the intention of one who *thus* takes possession of his heritage.”

“True, Father Velasquez,” was the reply;—“if the Marquis wish,” she added, with her sweet smile, “I will be his cicerone thither: this by the way is his first advent, I hear, at La Chalautre; how came he to think of visiting?”

Josse and Pierrefeu had already exchanged glances in dread of the ill-omened question, when Merrick risked the rudeness of an interruption, and saved much embarrassment to his friend by infinite detriment to his own first impression on the fair speaker.

“It was I,” said he, “that brought him here; I knew the place of old, and seeing the new spire rising

where I had left a ruin, thought the circuit through this pleasant glade would be the best mode of approaching La Chalaudre."

Father Velasquez bowed his head as if in grave approval, and taking up the conversation, spoke of the reverend care with which Mademoiselle Annechet (then Merrick for the first time heard her name) had from the moment she arrived with him from Bruges, sought to re-construct the holy building; of the liberal manner in which Madame de Malguet had consented to anticipate the Marquis's concurrence; of how the material had been supplied—brick from the condemned out-offices, stone from the ruin and from a neighbouring quarry, and seasoned timber from the felled oaks of last year's cutting in the forest; "and here," continued the bland priest, "behold our architect, whose taste and skill has raised this little sacred pile as if rather it had sprung from the hallowed soil than been the work of mortal hands!"

"The country people say," observed the steward, "that the angels must have laboured at the work by night to bring it to such forwardness."

"Men's hands may be strengthened extraordinarily, my children, in a good work," gravely observed Father Velasquez, "and the human semblance of an

angelic being inspire them to labour so by day that in the morning they return to the work of their hands and are astonished: — *non cessaverunt miracula, filia mea,*” he added.

Annechet, who had blushed rosy red at the mention of her able and pious exertions, became pale again at these mysterious words, and rapt for a moment in the beatitude of holy meditation, looked up to Heaven like a saint inspired. The man who thus mixed the leaven of earthly flattery with things celestial, and dashed the whole with mysticism, was supposed to be in secret one of that mighty order who have done good deeds before God on doubtful principles. He was of the low countries, derived from a Spanish family, and had filled the office of confessor to the convent where Annechet had passed her life. Scruples instilled by him were supposed to have interfered with her taking the veil; perhaps the presumptive heiress of La Chalaudre might prove more conducive secularly in a land where Holy Church had to be re-established *ad majorem Dei gloriam*, than spiritually she could do enshrined for life at Bruges. Be that as it may, the good man had entered France with his fair and interesting charge, as a missionary into Heathendom, and he found among the vassals of La Chalaudre implicit faith and

implicit obedience. He had not been prepared for an heir male, but the Church might be served for all that, and in the plenitude of that faith "he took not his hand from the plough, because the land looked not fertile."

But the party walked round the little chapel, and as they move Annechet holds forth upon her work, Merrick being her most attentive listener, his mechanical turn inclining him doubtless to the subject.

"You ask me," said she, "how I learned these things? Remember I was bred up among churches, and loved the graceful gothic from my childhood. See! I have added these flying buttresses to the building to give it breadth, and the effect of height will follow from the pinnacles I planned this morning. Oh! fear not! the masons know their duty now, and can follow my outline on the stone as neat-handedly as though they had learned to work *ogive* from their boyhood. Look, for instance, at that leaf-work capital to the pillars of the little porch; that's a design from the cathedral of Mentz; or better still, the open work in the spandril of the windows: how poor dear sister Athanasia, good father, would have envied me this work; and oh!

how she would scold if she knew I were working in Gothic instead of her beloved Byzantine!"

Thus talking they made the circuit of the building; the sailor, in admiration of the skill and taste with which the ornamental work was done, lingering to examine it — so long indeed that ere he was aware Annechet had left him, and with the rest of the party had entered the body of the church. As he reached the porch, about to follow them, Father Velasquez kneeled, the fair devotee beside him, while not a man there but must needs follow the devout example. Then rose from the deep-voiced priest a solemn prayer for the soul of him that had died, celebrating the sacrifice of the mass in that desecrated but still holy spot. Merrick, partly from some Protestant prejudices he had, partly lest his entry should interrupt the prayer, remained in the doorway; and thought upon the strange vicissitudes of life that placed the son, a noble, on his knees praying for him whom the plebeian mother there had, blaspheming, murdered. He withdrew from the porch as the orison concluded; but his absence had been observed, and was not forgotten.

As Annechet and the rest came forth, the priest suggested that she, with her attendants, should find their way to the château, and apprise Madame de

Malguet of the Marquis's arrival. As nothing could be more proper, obviating the anomaly of the dragoon's entering his father's house in company with the scarce known maiden, Annechet smiled her adieu, and stepped gracefully forward; when Pierrefeu, however, ventured to detain her with his report of having killed the birds of ill omen.

"And right it is," added the keeper, who had undergone an extraordinary lapse of a sudden from liberal opinions to orthodoxy, and even something more — "right it is that these same evil birds, that came here only after man's blood had been shed, should be kept from the neighbourhood of a Christian church! Do you remember how they screamed and chattered, as I, that have lived among wild birds, never saw proper magpies do, when Mason Martin began to take the stones off the old steeple?"

Michel, who had certain egg-stealing reasons of his own for the opinion, suggested that it was because their nest was there; but this view of the matter was rejected with great scorn, at least by Pierrefeu and the workmen.

"Do you believe that they are ill-omened," asked the dragoon of Annechet.

"I really would rather they were away than here," was the honest answer of one imbued from child-

hood with the superstitions of the Flemings. "I cannot tell why, yet, though I am sorry they are dead, poor things, their noisy familiarity sounded like a boding to me. Remember," she continued with her smile, so that some might say she spoke in sport, — "ungirt is unblest; see a hare and travel spare; follow no first work on Friday,—all these are things to mind; but most of all recollect, for you were near doing it to-day, never leave a church last, if there be priest or clerk in company."

"And why?" inquired the colonel.

"Because," she replied, looking towards the church, "who does so bears misfortune with him for a year afterwards!"

As she spoke the sailor emerged from the porch, and advanced towards them.

CHAPTER VI.

THE humourist in Vivian Grey, who made a picture gallery of his parlour windows by looking on the same landscape through differently coloured panes, altered the face of nature as men in their moral vision change the acts of man. It is the mental retina that colours the deeds which it reflects, and the less sophisticated the reflector, the stronger the shade it imparts. Age and experience, or in other words, trial and trouble, deaden the medium to its proper neutral tint; but, till this be effected, to different natures the same subject may be bathed in the golden tintage of a Claude, or deepened by the bold obscure of Salvator Rosa, — and both wrongfully and against the truth. However so it is, and so men see their way, literally, as in that glass by which the sacred rhetorician exemplified his argument — darkly. This is the secret of what are termed first impressions, moral convictions, instinctive conceptions, and the like — the offspring of prejudice, and of that inaptitude to admit the influence of pos-

sible causes, which is the source of so much mischief. Under this colouring an honest and politic bluntness is taken as evidence of the manners of a boor; unobtrusion becomes indifference, and accident, offence. Under this influence, when properly considered, we explain the apparent paradox of the true importance of trifles, which, amalgamated, constitute human life, as by them men are made or marred; and contemplating it, we may smile in our turn at the wise man, who accepts chance, while he denies a destiny, as if all were not cause, and all effect.

Annechet with the steward, and attended by her lackey and her page, hastened towards the chateau to apprise Madame de Malguet of what would be, she knew, a serious disappointment to her; the failure, namely, of all those preparations for the formal reception of the heir of the house upon which she had been for weeks employed; nor was the disappointment confined to the lady of La Chalaudre alone. The fair nun of Bruges, as she was called on the estate, had her share of vexation; for whereas the mounting and the marshalling of the numerous tenantry, the preparation of banners, scutcheons, and every heraldic extravagance of the family,

“The clip’ winged griffins, and the molten ravens”—
in which old Josse so much delighted, the arrange-

ment for the performance of various quaint ceremonies (to which the Baron of Bradwardine's boot-jack was as sense and reason), connected with tenures of land by vassals on the estate, and other high matters, fell to Madame de Malguet, — the minor and more feminine portions of the solemnities devolved upon fair Annechet. Gifted with a natural perception of the tasteful and the elegant, and well instructed in the sort of system and order whereby ceremonials are conducted, she had contrived such processions of white-robed *rosières*, such sweet-voiced chorusses, such flower-strewings, and such decoration of the approach whereby the expected heir should come with leafy arches festooned and wreathed with all the floral richness of the season — she had in short, in fifty ways, so thrown the charm of soft and ingenious refinement over the rustic preparations for the fête, that she became elated with the sense of success, and happy in, more particularly, Madame de Malguet's pleasure over it. Then again to the recluse of Bruges the excitement was new, and the task that was undertaken to gratify others ended by giving a pretaste of the sweetness of worldly gratifications to the fair undertaker herself: nor was Father Velasquez averse; he, on the contrary, good man, encouraged her in the innocent enjoyment, and

Annechet's days were for a good week unflecked and bright as the cloudless summer sky they were passed under.

That day, however, which was to have witnessed the result of all this pleasing toil, beheld it in a manner nullified. The untimely advent of the Marquis and his friend withered the bloom of expectation, and robbed the fête of its main incident. And to whom could this *contre-temps* be due? Surely, thought the nun of Bruges, not to the Marquis, who, entering for the first time the domain of his fathers, would have his heart gladdened by the simple homage of his friends and vassals, and feel in their rejoicings the earnest of a mutual happiness to come! He, the noble and the chivalric, the gallant and the good, as he had showed himself to be, would never be churlish enough to disappoint the tender of good will, as if undesirous to reciprocate kindness with his dependants! Thus reasoned youthful brain and simple heart, and in this frame of thought answered the query as we may imagine. It was the sailor brought him to the chapel on foot, as one who literally was making a side-door entry on his inheritance; — it was he that boasted in a manner, and that, too, rudely, of having been the first to show the heir his own, — and doubtless this maritime mentor it was, who, with

his suggestions and his proposals, redolent of the cold temper of his nation, obtained of the dragoon a perhaps reluctant assent to this night journey, and matutinal arrival! Merrick was a heretic, and the nun of Bruges a bigot, — Merrick had incurred ill omen, and the nun of Bruges was superstitious, — but, last and worst of all, Merrick had been too much talked of, and the nun of Bruges was somewhat tired of his name. Madame de Malguet, sanguine and energetic, full of her design and mastered by her feelings, had overshot the mark in yielding to the still recurring inclination to descant on one subject, the obligations due to the sailor, his merits, his history, his character, his prospects, his wrongs. With her the heir of La Chalaudre was a sort of debtor and dependent upon Merrick, and accessory bound to aid in the execution of her plan; her nephew to be sure, but still but the other day a republican officer, destined to all appearance to live in disgrace and die in obscurity. Such was the picture as she looked upon it, in which the rules, so to say, of social perspective were reversed, and the whole effect engrossed by what was, to the eyes of the world, a subordinate object. With the young again there would be of course, in their estimate of things and persons at La Chalaudre, an influence irrespective of worldly position, — that of

the romantic as dominant over the real; so that, all things considered, there might be reason to fear lest the nun of Bruges and the lady of La Chalaute were, like the knights in the fable, gazing at opposite sides of the same thing, and that in anticipation of actual events whereby the object might be coloured faithfully.

With swift and gliding gait, such as the Roman poet pictures when he would make his hero conscious of the earthly presence of the queen of charms, — fair Annechet sought the chateau, and passing through the hall, cumbered with furniture half unpacked, and full of busy workmen, she went direct to the suite of apartments occupied by Madame de Malguet. It was the same range of chambers on the ground floor which she inhabited before, altered only in that the access to them was by the door opening from the hall into the private passage, instead of from the terrace. To glide through this, and find her way to the lady's dressing-room, was the business of a moment, and hardly had Annechet patience to wait till the chamber-door had fairly yielded to her hand, ere the words burst forth that had been trembling on her lips for utterance.

“ Oh! think, aunt, of our surprise! the Marquis has arrived!”

She, whom for want of any definite tie of relationship Annechet thus addressed, was sitting at her toilette, while Brigitta busied herself with what to her was a labour of love, the brushing and arranging of the long and silken hair both were so proud of.

“The Marquis!” exclaimed Madame de Malguet — “and alone!”

“He walked to the chapel from his carriage after having travelled all night, and surprised me at work with the good father and my masons! think of the disappointment for the poor people! no public entry, no ——”

“Is he alone, Annechet, did you say?” again asked the lady with a sort of trepidation at her heart — “and why this nocturnal journey?”

“Oh! to avoid the heat” — was the reply, in a tone and with a gesture of resignation (the way in which nuns are angry), but which meant besides — “as if a soldier need have cared for that!”

Madame de Malguet was embarrassed, first by the news; second by a question which she had not courage to ask again. There was one read her thoughts, during the instant’s silence that ensued, and with her usual readiness averted the awkwardness of the moment.

“Let *Celenza*,” said the Calabrese, “not turn her

head to speak, just for one moment till the knot is done; and then, still in her native language which Annechet spoke with great purity, she continued, “*Celenza* wished to know what suite is with the Marquis?”

“His suite I know not of,” replied the nun of Bruges, “I saw no one with him but his friend, the English captain.”

“The knot is done, *Celenza*,” said the Calabrese, as Madame de Malguet sighed (but not with sorrow), and rose, this being the daily conclusion of her habilliment, to consult with Annechet, and with Josse as to the reception of the early visitors. Fortunately Father Velasquez was master, among other small merits that go to the making of good management, of that unintrusive consideration for others, which, when exerted without an ulterior object, is one proof of a real gentleman; and knowing the confusion which existed at the château, detained the Marquis and his friend with an architectural disquisition which soon became historical, and then glided with history into warlike topics having reference to the attack and defence of places. Both his auditors were as much astounded at his information as they were captivated by his style of conversation and his manner. The dragoon forgot utterly he was talking with a priest,

while Merrick longed to ask, how being one, he had mastered subjects apparently so antagonistic to his calling. It was at least three quarters of an hour that were thus insensibly occupied in the mere walk from St. Ursule des Fonds to La Chaulautre.

This time had there been turned to good account. The hall was cleared, the rooms readied, the newly arrived furniture arranged, and, on entrance, nothing reminded one of alteration or of disrepair, except the slight scaffolding supported upon which an artist of some capability laboured to cover the blank walls of the winding staircase with a succession of views as taken in the ascent of the Simplon. These were supposed to be seen in the far distance through a trelliswork, which, serving both as arbour and espalier, opposed all the way up its richly tinted masses of fruit and flower against the alpine grey and mimic snows of the far landscape. This (the idea of the nun of Bruges) replaced the sprawling goddesses, nude nymphs, and shameless satyrs, whom, with their gross republican travesty, Madame de Malguet had banished from the walls, before Annechet's pure eye could hurt itself against them. Short as the time had been it had yet sufficed, with the lady's energy and Annechet's method, to arrange for a holding of the pre-ordered sports and ceremonies that afternoon

upon the easy understanding that matters had simply been reversed, and that the heir having beforehand come to them, his vassals should with their greeting come to him, instead of, as was intended, awaiting his arrival. Annechet, delighted at the non-disappointment of her chorusses and her *rosières*, emerged from her state of resignation into the usual expression of content, now placid, now joyous, that found its natural home in those fair features. Madame de Malguet despatched Josse to arrange the novel necessary details, and both ladies were on the terrace, as unemployed as ladies ought to be, by the time the Marquis, Merrick, and the priest had, in their leisurely progress, reached the foot of the stair which led to it.

The meeting was feelingless and quiet to a fault, ostensibly. The dragoon was constrained by having to maintain a show of indifference which might match the quiescent dignity of the lady of Chalaudre. The lady again was reserved beyond the point required for the repression of feeling; vexed at the change in Merrick's appearance, hurt (she too!) at his untimely coming, and anxious as to the first impression he had made upon fair Annechet. *She*, again, was impassive, listening with her sweet nun's smile to all the sailor

said, and thinking of her wreaths and garlands the while, with her nun's heart amid their roses. Merrick alone was something like himself: he thought his friend cold, but Annechet charming: his fit of exuberant spirits was on him, but, half-chilled by the frozen festivity of the breakfast they were soon seated to partake of, it sat upon him ill: his friend he thought was not herself, — more womanly but less real, an involuntary satire upon the sex which, however, had, in the case of Madame de Malguet, its foundation in truth. The gift of womanhood, like the gift of words, according to a celebrated diplomatist, is to conceal the thoughts, and with this insensible feminine barrier around her, the lady of La Chalaute was other than she used to be. The morning meal concluded, the party separated; the ladies, bent on needful preparations for the evening festivities, while the dragoon and Merrick took horse, and strolled abroad for many a mile through forest, field, and meadow, the sailor's knowledge of the country enabling him to serve as guide to the new-come heir throughout his property, such of it at least as lay in the immediate neighbourhood of the château. If aught remarkable during the day's ramble could have been noted as to the behaviour of

either, it might perhaps have shown itself in an absence of vivacity with Merrick, and an excess of indifference in the dragoon. Their humour for the time was uncongenial, and it was a relief to both when the tour was at an end; this being perchance the first time that one or the other experienced such a feeling, after mixing as they had so much in unre-served companionship.

Thou art a pleasant thing, Novelty, but more pleasant at the outset than in the maturer stage of life; a welcome and accepted guest when the chambers of the mind in their vacant brightness take thee in, what-so thy shape, as a void to be filled; but the guest has ripened into the sojourner, and his place knows him; yet still fresh Novelty arrives, and alas! the newcomer cannot be lodged without displacement of some preceding tenant: old association is jostled by fresh fancy, and ancient liking, half-ousted by a later love, lies cramped and stiffened in his narrow home. Thus alteration, even for the apparent better, inflicts a certain shock, when occurring in middle age, and wealth without the moral vitality to enjoy it; and the usage that makes its uses common, acts at first as a transmuting power upon its recipient; like the drowned monarch in Ariel's song, the riches of his new element supplant his very entity —

“ Of his bones is coral made ;—
Those be pearls that were his eyes ;
Nothing of him that can fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.”

Whether the old moodiness that now recurred with the be-riched dragoon were truly the offspring of that growing care of which, while gazing on his new possessions, he professed to feel a prophetic fore-taste ; or whether other thoughts had a greater share in its production, of a more delicate though still more troublous character, it were superfluous to enquire, seeing that the fit lasted at its height but a few hours. A simple and a pleasant sight brought with it, ere those hours had fled, alleviation to the oppression of riches, and brightness back again upon the darkened spirit ; it was that of a multitude of contented happy people.

Down the broad chase, now cleared of intrusive coppice, bush, and bramble, and widened to the utmost amplitude of its full proportions, stretching away for miles from the rear of La Chalaudre up the dark hill, and into the deep forest, — see, how they come from far and near, in carriole, cart, and waggon, on horseback and on foot, by hundreds, to do homage to their lord ! every glade sends forth from

time to time fresh parties of the sturdy peasantry, the women's holiday attire glancing gaily through the green leaves, and the sound of mirth and laughter revelling among the quiet purlieus, disputing their masterhood with the scared and startled deer. A place more admirably suited for such a gathering could hardly have been found; for as the gradual slope of the hill gave the first faint indication of a rise at no great distance from the château, the busy scene lay up the slanting declivity of the chase; — groups of horses picketed beneath the trees, — the white tilts of the carts forming here and there a temporary encampment, — gay knots of the rustic travellers reclining, for refreshment, — and even in some few spots already music and the dance, that national passion, — showed like an ever-changing picture, whose spirit only, joy, refused to vary. The plateau near the mansion had been reserved for later and more orderly festivity, while the hunting lodge which had erst served for the old steward's residence, renewed and smartened, was the hall in which the heir of La Chalautre should receive the graver homage of his wealthier lieges.

It was upon this scene that the eye of the Marquis fell, as, roused from a moody dream by the rushing sound of distant voices that gradually increased upon the hearing, he rose from the couch in his dressing-

room, whither he had retired ill at ease in mind, and looked forth upon the chase, the forest, and their occupants. The use of wealth, whispered Conscience,—is it not to make men happy?—and the balm against discontent,—is it not the sight of happiness? At this moment, from below his window, arose the pure harmonies of a choir of female voices, chaunting an old conventual hymn. At the same moment a general movement agitated the numerous assemblage,—the men in the nearer groups uncovered as with slow and respectful step they advanced upon the lawny plateau near the mansion,—the women seemed by action to invoke a blessing,—many of the devout crossed themselves, and there was a confused murmur, amid which the dragoon thought he could detect “the nun;—the nun of Bruges!” repeated again and again in accents of affectionate admiration. Meanwhile, to a sweet and solemn strain of ancient days, the monkish rhymes breathed forth once more their soothing exhortation —

“ *Anima, contenta tace;
Sortem accipe in pace,
Neque verbo pervicace
Provoca supplicium :
Te quocunque urget fatum,
Domini est judicatum ;
Nunquam inclementer datum
Illius judicium.*”

The rude words conveyed no meaning to the dragoon; but there seemed to float, amid their liquid syllables, a reproach, as of one that grieved tenderly over the sullenness of an ungrateful spirit; and as the song went slowly on, and the groups of people followed with a sort of decent and reverent curiosity, he looked down, but cautiously, lest he should be seen, for the singers. They formed a goodly procession—some thirty young women clothed in white, headed by one whom, though her back was turned, no eye that once had seen her figure could mistake. Had the dragoon known them, he might have recognised in her immediate supporters the redundant, but tender-hearted, Amelie, and the medlar-bred rigidity of Lucrèce; the rest were tenants' daughters, and young peasant girls of the estate, whom Annechet's skill had trained to a conventual regularity of movement, and no mean proficiency in giving effect to the music she had taught them. Behind the column of fair choristers, followed at an interval the lady of La Chalaudre, accompanied and surrounded by her few local connections, and what, in a military mood, the Marquis might have termed the staff of the establishment: there was Madame de Felingue, Madame Finot and her husband, Eugene La Fosse as their daughter's betrothed (thanks to forty thousand francs

of those won in the Leghorn snuff-shop), and his father as family physician : Josse and Brigitta, Pierrefeu and the household at large brought up the rear.

As Annechet passed the door in the ruined wing, there was a little check in the procession. The chant ceased, as she opened it, and forthwith her followers, producing each a basket of choice flowers, entered after her. Madame de Malguet looked in, and saw—for the place was cleared now, and a ruinous cross-wall or two removed—the choristers, after scattering the contents of their baskets on her mother's tomb, kneel for an instant with Annechet, and then under her guidance again resume their places. This simple loving tribute to the dead, and in her to the living, as the commencement of the day's ceremonial, was wholly the delicate idea of the nun of Bruges. It touched the lady of La Chalaute to the core of her true feeling heart. She could do no more than lean against the door-way awaiting Annechet's re-appearance ; then seizing her in her arms with an energy of grateful affection, that betrayed itself in the action, she kissed her rapidly on the forehead and each cheek, and smiling through tears, signed to her to proceed. This was a sort of homage to the beauty of soul of that fair creature, paid too by one they loved, which caused a simul-

taneous exclamation among the attentive crowd, and a shrill murmur as of many female voices arose, until it was hushed by the resumption of the solemn plaintive chant. They moved on, the choristers leading, the lady then and her attendants, and lastly the orderly and somewhat awe-struck crowd; by slow degrees all disappeared. There stood a vision, however, by the doorway of the ruined wing, which the dragoon still saw.

“Will his Lordship please to dress?”

When the question had been three times asked, the valet coolly threw down a screen.

“Meudon!” exclaimed the dragoon, turning from the window.

“Will his Lordship please to dress?” reiterated the Parisian quietly.

“Is it so late?”

“Late!” and Meudon shrugged his shoulders; “yes, for hours in this place, and country pleasures; the ceremony of the fête has begun at any rate.”

“And why am I not there? and where is the Captain?”

“They are a sort of patriarchal people here,” replied the valet, “and sufficiently priest-ridden, having, indeed, as your Lordship has observed, a priest present on the spot to ride them;—not,”

added he, observing that this tone, which had sometimes amused the dragoon, failed now to elicit a smile, — “not that a place in which devotion sits so gracefully — but enough ! I tire your Lordship. The fact is, as I discovered on arrival, that there is a mass to be performed on the occasion of your Lordship’s accession ; the procession towards it,” and he looked towards the open window, — “ your Lordship has doubtless seen ; well, — your Lordship’s presence, as I learn from a very intelligent young Flemish person who serves Mademoiselle de Malguet, was, as suggested by that young lady, not requested, from motives of delicacy to your Lordship’s feelings ; while, as I gathered, Captain Merrick showed this morning some sort of repugnance to enter the church, which, added to his being a heretic, and your Lordship’s intimate companion, decided them upon leaving his society at your Lordship’s disposal, pending the celebration of the solemnity.”

“ And why did not you attend it, Meudon ? ” inquired the dragoon, upon whom the cool verbiage of the Parisian began to exercise its customary conversational effect.

“ I had to dress your Lordship ; — *not* full dress, I think your Lordship said ? I comprehend ; here is the half dress ready ; — Captain Merrick wears half

dress;—oh! as to mass, your Lordship observed?—why, to tell the truth, *je n'y mords pas*;—with accessories, to be sure, such as one had to-day, a choir of charming young ——”

“Meudon, you talk too much sometimes,” was the spoken reply; “with accessories!” was the inward thought. Yes, indeed, with *such* an accessory to make religion other than a form, and a rite, Father Velasquez might gain strange converts!

“But how is this, Meudon?” exclaimed the Marquis aloud, as, completing his soldier’s toilette, he turned again to the casement; “your patriarchal people seem undevotional enough in spite of all you say,”—and he pointed to the chase, on which no small assemblage yet appeared.

“Oh! but your Lordship knows,” rejoined the valet in an apologetic tone, “that when one speaks of a pious community, the phrase refers only to old folks, boys, and women;” and with a philosophic nonchalance the Parisian proceeded to answer a knock at the door of the antechamber.

It was Merrick, who in like manner having retired to his own apartment, missed, like his friend, the opening of the ceremonial. The dragoon, who had been at least spectator of a portion of it, described what he had seen, not without a remark as to the

absence of guests of a superior order, a circumstance which in his secret heart had somewhat disturbed the new-recognised noble. Meudon hastened to elucidate, and again on the authority of the intelligent young Flemish person, stating that the reception of the heir of La Chalaute on his own ground, was purposely intended to be of a private character, and as such attended only by the employés, dependents, and vassals of the family; "the rather too," he delicately continued, "by reason of the incompleteness of certain proceedings in Paris: his Lordship, as I gather, has seen the whole number of those who assist on the occasion, except, by the way, two persons, a professor of some sort, and apparently his wife, who having arrived too late, are engaged in recriminations of a very matrimonial character in the *salon*, whither they found their way, and whence I heard them, as I came up the grand staircase."

"'Tis Picotot," exclaimed the sailor, as with a smile at the idea of seeing the purist in the bloom of professorial dignity, the friends left the room to seek the worthy couple, invited to the fête, not for themselves of course, but as having been so intimately connected with the early period of an acquaintance which had ultimately led the Marquis to the halls he trod as master. The meeting was all joy on one

side and cordiality on the other, but as what passed is not material to our story, and, to say the truth, as in right it was supposed of his professorship, the illustrious Picotot now so Frenchified his English and Anglified his French as to be very nearly unintelligible, little is lost, except to the curious in philology, by the non-record of what was said.

Meanwhile, the holy rites performed, back to the chateau streamed the joyous throng with a feeling at the heart as though their festivity had been sanctified. Emancipated from any restriction of processional order, the groups, even to Annechet's choristers, dispersed as they listed into this or that path, leading to the chase; scarcely one, however, failed in humbly greeting their pastor, who, partaker of their sports, blessed them with grave affectionate gesture, and in the same breath bade them sing, dance, and be glad of heart. Father Velasquez was deeply versed in the science of popularising religious feeling, one admirable mode of creating a flock, at least devotional and certainly obedient. He preached, — "Pray, and be happy:" others, who call themselves better Christians, but who are certainly less politic ones, cry aloud, — "Pray, because ye are miserable!" The first of these two dicta is the one to carry all before it with the youthful heart: the gush of kindli-

ness and love fuses itself into that religion which *is* love, unites the two indissolubly, and thus all love with it becomes devotion. The exaltation which ensues in the young mind is of two kinds: the purely spiritual, and the spiritual conceived through an earthly object; and its results are the faultless nun, and the admirable wife, according as the dominant power of the teacher chooses to develop the one or the other devotional inclination. Annechet was in the hands of one who could mould her as he willed, and he had not willed for her the cloister.

How beautiful she looked, joyous, graceful, infantine in expression, womanlike in form and gesture, as in the midst of the train that followed the lady of La Chalaute she made her gladsome way towards the château! The Marquis and his friend had both, on the first appearance of the returning crowd, moved on to meet Madame de Malguet; but it was unlucky that the Picotots should have accompanied them; for the sailor, in his kind-hearted brotherly way, offered, as usual, the Picototte his arm. Now defamation falls on maiden's ears as fire upon ice; the cold knows not the hot; yet, although its liquid purity will quench, even as it falls, the burning pellicle, the frozen surface suffers an abrasion, which lasts, though that which caused it, cannot do so. Who

could suggest the idea of wrong to a mind previously incapable of supposing how wrong could consist, ay — to a heavenly mind — for a worldly purpose? There was one there did so, and in a phrase of sanctity.

The parties meet with fair greeting, Madame de Malguet takes her nephew's arm, and looks around to see another pair, that one she would have matched, follow her in their destined order; but Annechet is already gone with her young companions. She has started off to marshal some further graceful and ingenious grouping, having to do with the mode in which the *rosières* of the villages, young girls conspicuous for filial piety, industry, and good conduct, were to be presented before the Seigneur of La Chalaudre to receive the wreath emblematic of their virtues, and the dower, their substantial reward. Meanwhile, as the Marquis with the lady of La Chalaudre walked slowly towards the hunting lodge wherein the feudal dues were to be rendered, and the wealthier tenants and farmers presented to their lord, and as the bulk of the party passed on with them, Merrick and La Fosse dropped behind to renew a conversation, which had as yet been no more than mere talk of ailment and recovery. It was rather an awkward moment for the herbalist, Merrick's eye beamed with good-

humoured merriment, as he confronted the free-thinker and the republican on his way from mass, to do honour to feudalism.

“Absurd enough, eh?” inquired La Fosse, as if to disarm his assailant by taking the offensive, “absurd enough, indeed! I know you want me to quote the —

‘*Parcus deorum cultor, et infrequens*’ —

“Heaven forbid!” thought the sailor.

“But I won’t, sir, I won’t, — seeing that I cultivate the gods, in Horatian phrase, very assiduously and piously after mine own fashion, and always have done so; but this mass-mummery!”

“And oh! Doctor, Doctor, this revival of feudalism, countenanced by you!”

“Bah! effete and exploded, — abolished by law, and swept off the face of the earth years ago! This is no revival, Merrick, nor, as you are pleased to say, countenanced by me,” added the lapsarian liberal, with embarrassed earnestness, — “but a sort of flicker of the lamp before it sinks into night, the last rally of vitality which precedes dissolution; a thing observable not less in the life of social bodies composed of men, than in the individual man himself! and here am I, in my medical capacity, for we republicans are the surgeons of society, letting her blood a

little, and purging her from time to time, — in my medical capacity, I say, watching the symptoms that precede collapse. Why, *corbleu* ! if I were called in at the demise of my bitterest enemy, you would not have me refuse my functions ? ”

At this mingled tirade of whim, sense, and sophistry, the sailor laughed till La Fosse could affect gravity no longer.

“ Come, come, my good friend,” he said, “ we are one man’s sons after all, and children of circumstance to boot ; if I pocket my opinions, and play Ovid among the Goths, ’tis for my dear Eugene’s interest, — *interest*, mark you ; for he being a youth *ingenui pudoris*, as our friend hath it, and of a sort of sub-poetic temperament, wants to marry Finot’s daughter, whom the boy has long loved, and she, a nice girl though given to pinguitude, refused it seems a better offer for him —

—— ‘ Neque sic fidelem,
Sic lucro aversam potuisse nasci ’ —

as Horace says, from any but a good woman as her mother is :—then comes this noble (noble I mean in its good sense,) this noble old woman, and gives Eugene forty thousand francs, besides the little I can spare, if Finot will let them marry ! Lucky, you

know, because with this cursed air, and the puerperal ——”

“ Noble, indeed !” repeated Merrick, as the words “ refused a better offer ” struck his ear in connection with the gift.

“ Nay, that’s not all : Adolphe Finot, the son, that exhibited yonder *pilulam plumbeam* in his practice with you, is to have the Montbazon girl, Lucretia yonder, with a much larger dower (sum unknown), also given by this generous lady !”

A sort of instinctive inkling of the truth flashed across the sailor’s mind.

“ And where is the young man, then ?”

“ Why he is kept away as an offering for our general sins, a scapegoat, sir, forsooth ——

—— ‘ hædus

Cui frons turgida cornibus

Primis.’ ”

“ My dear Doctor,” exclaimed Merrick, as the herbalist chuckled over the conceit, —— “ you know I don’t understand you : why —— ”

“ *Corbleu !* man, shall I cease to be witty because thou art not literate ? why, I mean —— but look you ! See that group of young girls going up to the lodge with Mademoiselle de Malguet ; the tallest is the Montbazon.”

“ Well ? ”

“ Mark the contrast ! look at the unnatural staid manner, the affected primness of the walk, the suggestive over-decency of that too much dress, and watch the covert-rolling, curious, unquiet eye, and the smile — why, sir, she’s smiling under her lip, and it shows through the skin ! Ah ! depend on it, *hædus* is a true victim, a gone kid, and will soon have something to hang his sacrificial ivy on ; — there is snow on *Ætna*, Merrick, there is snow upon *Ætna*.”

And as the sailor looked, the meaning of the second dower dawned upon him.

“ But see ! ” continued the garrulous physician, — “ mark this other contrast to that creature ! What a specimen of the genus ! Nature’s nobility in her gait, and goodness like a halo beaming from her sweet pure features, fit shrine for a fine spirit ! Ah ! my dear friend, he is a lucky fellow that shall class that specimen as one of his own adoption in his domestic catalogue, *Annechetta incomparabilis* NOBIS — eh ? ”

Merrick judged that he was not called upon to reply by more than a gesture to the semi-scientific jargon, but the words sank into his heart, and found the acquiescent response already written there. The

group passed on, approached the lodge, and disappeared among the crowd without it.

“The third,” observed the Doctor, “was Eugene’s love, my daughter, — a good girl, and a fat withal; but come, are *you* going in yonder to see our friend, the dragoon, give away acres of good land for a cock-sparrow, and three pepper-corns, or an owl in an ivy-bush, or some such foolery, all because his eighteenth lineal ancestor was ass and coxcomb enough to do so?”

Merrick replied simply that he wished much to see whatever there was to be seen.

“*Annechetta incomparabilis* included, eh? Listen, my dear and my good Merrick,” continued the worthy man, forsaking his tone of pedantic banter for one of simple kindly gravity; “I had thought, with others, you might perchance take up your residence here, after the struggle of life —

‘Sit modus lasso maris, et viarum,
Militiæque,’ —

as our friend has it: now, if you are going to do so, take care; I am not a man of plans, nor intrigues, ‘*non ego*’ — well, I won’t quote; but there are those that are so here, and amid these marryings, and dowerings, these comings of priests and fair maidens,

these massings and these mumblings, there is something a plain man cannot understand: among other things, have you heard whether that fair being is to be affianced to the dragoon? Whence the rumour I know not, but it is rife here."

With these words, La Fosse pressed his arm, and left him. The sailor stood awhile in silent thought, and then with uncertain steps, as if attracted thither by some unseen power, made his way towards the lodge.

CHAPTER VII.

THE intense heat of the season has been mentioned, and at La Chalaudre it was indeed hot that day. The wind—the little wind there was—blew from the south-west, so that the hill and forest intervened to check the breeze, and cause in the valley a sultry calm, only rendered tolerable by the descent of the sun, which promised early shadows, thanks to the elevation of the height that enviously had so long shut out the air;—a sort of type of worldly greatness which atones for a year's slight by a day's overshadowing condescension.

In such an atmosphere, the crowded state of the hunting lodge became, before a quarter of an hour were past, an evil too apparent to be borne—at least by its more delicate inmates. It is hard to say how fully, or how incompletely, this or that homage were performed, as, contrary to expectation, Madame de Malguet's impatience seconded the indifference of her nephew in abbreviating, or quashing, even the pre-ordained formalities. Old Josse, who would have

gone through the whole roll of suit and service, acknowledgment thereof, and redemption therefrom on such and such condition,—together with the tenure list and its obligations,—was grievously balked of his expectations; for what with service admitted and excused, homage tendered and waived, and tenure-proof offered and deferred, the dream he had dreamed of,—the restitution of feudal rights,—vanished in the nothingness of their assertion. Madame de Malguet had dreamed another dream, but it was fading from her, for *he* was not where he should have been, nor had been the whole day. She broke up, with the dragoon's glad consent, the ill-imagined assemblage, and hurrying as to seek a fresher air, met on the threshold, Merrick.

“So soon?” he asked in some surprise.

“So late!” replied the lady with a serious smile; “where have you been, and why away from us?” Then, in a lower tone as she saw her party coming to the door,—“Your arm, Merrick, for an instant.”

They preceded the party, conspicuous in which was the dragoon walking by Annechet's side, and as they went, Madame de Malguet said in her rapid urgent way—

“Well, is she not charming? is she not attractive? is she not beautiful? Oh! Merrick, do you not like

her? Would you not wish your wife were like that? say — speak!”

“So fair, and pure, and loveable a being, — so striking at first sight I never saw: ’tis a holy beauty to be praised only in the poetry of holy writ, when the eye sees her, then it blesses her!”

Madame de Malguet seemed to hang her soul upon his words.

“You could love her then? Oh! do love her, Merrick, love her for my sake, that I may make you rich, and see you happy;” and in her heart the sentence was concluded — “and think that had I been such, you might have loved me.”

“How shall I answer you?” exclaimed the sailor, “you almost lame love’s wings with such a load of kindness!”

“Lame love’s wings with kindness, say you? when professed prosaists talk poetry, my friend,” — said the lady, with a smile she meant to be cheerful.

“Men will say they *are* in love, you mean? there is much truth goes through the world disguised in guesses.”

“Then what are you about!” exclaimed Madame de Malguet with a sort of stern surprise in her abruptness, — “why do you keep away? why do you not make yourself known? my nephew is your friend,

as anxious as am I to see you settled; — he, — I, — all around her speak your praise, — why hang you back?”

“Nay, ’tis not I hang back, ’tis she I think avoids me.”

“Is it possible?” was the reply, half spoken in doubt, and half, I fear, in the blindness of predilection; — “but no, — you err, Merrick: she is but shy of strangers, and knows not your tastes; she speaks Italian as you or I do, — address her in it, and you will seem less English; ’tis unlucky, but she has been taught, I fear, to hate the people, — I tell you this in time that you may avoid national allusions.”

“But she is convent-bred, and half a nun, — how is mere language to avail?”

“Not much,” interposed Madame de Malguet with a melancholy smile, “if you talk to her, my poor Merrick, of the Buova d’Anton, that never read other verse than Filicajas; convent-bred — yes — but intelligent, and very well informed, and full of crusading chivalry: I gave her the Gierusalemme, and she quotes it already by stanzas as if she had swam lifelong in a gondola: a Byzantine nun, one sister Anastasia, taught her Romaic, and even Greek, and filled her with the idle sort of holy patriotism

that lives still among these people:—talk to her of the Mediterranean, and the Isles, as you can do, and you'll enchant her: but this is idle—teach her to know you, and ——”

She left the phrase unfinished, breaking it as abruptly as she broke herself away from beside the sailor, and, joining her party again, took the dragoon's arm, and went round among the happy groups of country people for whom dancing and sports of all kinds had been prepared; nor were tables wanting laid out by scores in pleasant spots beneath the trees (tables and seats alike of sylvan fabric, green and fragrant turf sods); nor wine in casks, nor flagons, to drink the Seigneur's health; nor, delight of all delights, the *Mat de Cocagne*, of which there were two, the poles being just so difficult of ascent as to render the feat interesting, just so easy as to enable the young fellows to bring down in succession from one of them, at which Pierrefeu presided, articles alternately useful and grotesque for themselves;—from the other, which of course was most frequented, ribbons, and lace, and now and then a cross of gold (grand ambition of the *paysanne*) for sister, mother, wife, or loved one, all replaced with liberal hand, as fast as the rifled cross yards were let down, by Brigitta. The shouts of laughter, the loud applause,

the screams of delight attracted the party to the spot. They stood within the ring watching the competitors, and as the nun of Bruges gazed round the circle, her eye flashed, and her fair cheek crimsoned.

“ See, aunt ! see, Monsieur de la Chalaute ! how happy the dear souls are ! Oh ! how blessed a thing to be able to gladden hearts so ! ”

“ It was this thought made me a wiser man,” said the dragoon, “ but a while ago.”

Merrick spoke, but the cheer of applause that followed a successful struggle to the very summit of the mast, drowned his words.

“ Bah ! ” observed Pierrefeu with a sort of cynicism as he replenished the lowered cross yards, “ it’s too easy for them ! but ’tis Mademoiselle would not let me grease the poles.”

“ What, Monsieur Pierrefeu, would you spoil the poor souls’ Sunday clothes ? ”

“ Ah ! Mademoiselle thinks of every one, and *for* every one ! ” observed the keeper ; an observation assented to by a score of voices, and taken up by a hundred others, so that it was, blushing, amid a shower of blessings, that Annechet proposed a movement toward a group of dancers. It would have been difficult to have described the effect which the sight

of these festivities produced upon fair Annechet, unless the innocent ecstasy of a girl of thirteen could be engrafted on the guarded demeanour of a gentlewoman of five-and-twenty, and the two embodied in her graceful person, whose every motion bespoke the lightness of a joyous spirit, that natural poetry in action which art can only imitate by overfeeding the eye with too much nature. Her kindly heart expanded; she would have made the whole world happy as herself; and in this mood, what wonder that she should fall into easy pleasant converse with the sailor upon some reference to his profession suggested by the game they had just witnessed? Merrick spoke well and without constraint when he found his audtress cheerful and disposed to be pleased with him, and as Madame de Malguet failed to keep pace with the livelier step of her niece, Merrick found himself alone with her and her young companions some way in advance. If I make little or no mention of the rest of the château party and their sayings, it is because in my tale, as in very fact, the bright glad apparition of this woman-infant, in the dawning to her of the world's enjoyment, eclipsed them, even in their own esteem; so pre-eminent, yet so natural and inoffensive in her superiority, that aunts and mothers even bowed to its fascination,

and their youthful charge loved the fair creature as though she were but some more beautiful sister of their own.

“Dance, Amelie!” she cried, as they reached the plot of open sward where fresh quadrilles were beginning: “dance, you quiet Lucrèce! You happy girls, that can dance; but go,—here come your partners; the higher you skip, the better will my heart dance with you.”

And as these took their places, Merrick asked her why she spoke in such abnegation of a pleasure she seemed so much to appreciate.

“Appreciate, say you?” answered she, with her mellow pleasant laugh; “you forget you speak to a poor nun,—or almost one: what know I of dancing?—except,—yes—*culpa mea*,”—and she crossed herself,—“I once made dear sister Anastasia show me the Romaika as she danced it when a girl: it was a sin, and we did penance for it.”

Madame de Malguet saw not the conventual sadness that smoothed the gentle dimpling of her cheek, nor Merrick’s disconcerted embarrassment. She but perceived a sort of understanding and apparent sympathy established between the woman she destined for him, and the man she loved; her heart sick but her duty done, she spoke of weariness and ailment,

and excused her retirement to seek quiet and a chair somewhere apart, leaving Annechet in the charge of Madame de Felingue and Finot. Father Velasquez watched but the tall figure of the Marquis established by the fair nun's side, and then with clerical courtliness of manner offered his humble service to attend the lady through the crowd in addition to the servants who, somewhat superfluously, made way for her.

The sun had set some time, and the dark glades were startled into light by a multitude of links and torches, here fixed against the trunk, there suspended from the boughs of the old oaks, or where these failed, stuck, candelabra like, alone in the green turf. The wild flickering of this strong rude radiance, its red and yellow tints, made more picturesque effects among the dew laden foliage, than a wilderness of coloured lamps. The young artist who was painting the staircase, founded his fortune on a sketch from this effect (which he had himself advised); and a dyer, Josse's nephew, there and then present, retired a rich man upon a shot-silk called *Feu Chaulautre*, a ruddy bronze, extant perchance to this day.

Amid smoke, and glare, and merry tumult, Madame de Malguet sought a dark and shady spot near the château, where some few sombre formally cut yew-

trees, remnants of the extirpated Dutch garden, still existed. There she sat her down, and rested after much toil ;— a sweet sensation and a comforting, when the mind, we cannot control, is mastered by the body it cannot stimulate beyond a certain point. Overtask the frame, and you arrive at dissolution ;— but short of this, repose will bathe the vexed soul for a while in oblivion, and men, dreaming, will sigh for the past which was not, and smile on the future which will never be.

The priest seated himself in silence not far from the lady, and left her to her meditations for a while ; but ere long, commencing by some general inquiry connected with Merrick, he drew her into conversation upon a subject she was never slow to speak of, with the latent purpose no doubt of impressing Madame de Malguet with a sense of the interest with which “ the sailor-friend of my soldier-patron ” had inspired him. His allusions to Merrick’s manner and style of conversation were so judicious, his approbation so measured and yet so marked, that, while there was nothing to betray the latency of an ulterior object, no friend of him bepraised but must have felt pride in hearing thus of the first impression made by him on an eminent and accomplished scholar and critic — of men as well as things, such as was Father

Velasquez. The words that sounded sweet in her ear had scarcely died away before loud and drawling voices of peasants, apparently on their way home, were heard approaching. Loudest and shrillest were the tones of a female, the mother, it would seem, of the family, as, imitating one of her own hens, she clucked her offspring round her.

“I don’t mind the boys, Papa Fallais — let them mind themselves; but, *Dieu de Dieu!* what a charge are five unmarried daughters!”

“Why, here are three of them, you noisy woman, you,” growled the reply of, doubtless, the papa appealed to.

“Fanchon, I know, and little Babet, and Nannette; but where are Marie and Katrine, I should like to know! Ma-a-a-rie! Ka-a-a-trine!” — and the human hen clucked again in yells of parental anxiety.

“Papa,” said a little half-crying, coaxing voice, that must have been Babet’s; “Papa, there are going to be fireworks; — *do* ask maman to stay for ——”

“Ah? here they are! *je les tiens!*” triumphantly exclaimed the mother biped, — “you naughty girls, how dare ——”

“Oh! maman,” cried two apologetic tones, the truants doubtless; “Gros Thomas, and Goulot ——”

“ And brother Pierre, and Madeleine Roux —— ”

“ And oh ! so many more would make us stay ! ”

“ Stay, you bad girls ! stay, without leave ! ”

“ Oh ! yes, maman, — to get quite near the marquis and see him and his fiancée, as they walked together looking so handsome ! ”

“ *Tiens !* ” exclaimed the mother, mollified by the prospect of gossip ; — “ *qui ça ?* ”

Father Velasquez here enquired with anxious interest whether Madame de Malguet were sufficiently rested, and rose as if inviting her to move ; the reply was thus lost her, but its tenor there could be no doubt of. She signed to stop him.

“ *Tiens !* ” rejoined the mother, rising in interest ; “ but who says that ? And then they call her a nun, you know, — and how are nuns to marry ? heh ! *dis donc*, Papa Fallais ! can nuns —— ”

“ Oh ! but it’s all settled, for when Madeleine Roux’s sister’s child was christened at Berlejac, the priest called it by her own foreign name, Annechet, because he said —— ”

A violent explosion, and a blaze of light from the chase, a scream of half-terror, half-delight, from little Babet, a hurry-scurry of people, — the fireworks had begun ! Too late, thought Father Velasquez, or

soon enough? Madame de Malguet said no word till she rejoined her party. It *was* too late, perhaps.

With, to their rustic spectators, the unheard-of splendour of some ordinary fireworks, and a transparency in which the ingenuity of the artist had depicted the endless quarterings of the family armorial shield, surrounded by every emblem of peace, plenty, power, and success, the fête, long memorable in the neighbourhood, concluded. The numerous assemblage broke up and dispersed, each to his own home, with many a merry laugh, and whoop, and call, but with scarcely a sign of excess, and none of strife or anger. The silver disk of the diminished moon rose above the forest, and shone placidly on the home-bound revellers, lending them her welcome light upon their way. The chase was deserted, the parting guests had gone, and those, as Madame de Felingue and the Finots, who stayed the night, were retired wearily to their chambers; yet still Annechet lingered on the terrace before the chateau, Madame de Malguet, Merrick, the Dragoon, and Father Velasquez, her companions.

“No, dear aunt,” she exclaimed, with her musical low laugh; “you must indeed let me be a naughty child to-night, and refuse to go to rest, as I used to do with the good sisters, who sometimes knew hardly

how to chide me bedwards; it is the animation of a new happiness that keeps me waking."

"Like a full-grown child, dear Annechet," said the lady, "that cannot sleep for thinking of its doll."

"And the doll?" enquired Merrick.

"And the happiness, my daughter?" asked the churchman in the grave and thoughtful style he could assume, and yet be gentle.

With a fascinating hesitation, unmixed, however, with the slightest taint of awkwardness, she answered Father Velasquez—

"The world is a new life for me, father, and it seems to me that I must have seen its brightest side, and tasted of its purest pleasures, to know the holy sort of excitement which proceeds from pure sympathy with the happiness of many fellow-creatures. I *am* a full-grown child, and answer questions like one," added she, with a half smile not destitute of humour, as she glanced below her eyelids towards the sailor;—"but even with the nothingness of my knowledge, I think I can trace out my dear aunt's 'doll' in the deeds," she said, laughingly, "of many full-grown children else than I: every one that has a motive and an object has his doll."

"We call it *hobby* in English," observed the sailor.

“And that is,—to ask a question of you in my turn?”

“A hack, or sorry horse, that one is always riding.”

“You are an equestrian people, you men of England,” observed the priest—“equestrian to excess, while in France the nation is said to be possessed by a passion for vain apparel; the one illustration balances the other, and the vanity of human wishes is best typified in either by a popular allusion to the national weakness.”

“It seems to me,” suddenly observed the dragoon, “that, with all deference, you have fallen beside the argument, if argument there were; for Mademoiselle spoke of a sympathy with the feelings of fellow-creatures, that is, of all mankind, and consequently of something sincere—of something above national vanities, which vanish when nations rise in concert to strive sincerely for a common object!”

“Good!” exclaimed involuntarily the nun of Bruges, who was thinking of blessed Palestine and a new crusade.

“You honour me,” replied the new made noble, whose head was teeming with universal republicanism as he spoke of kindred nations.

“You have forgotten one fact, friends,” said Madame de Malguet, “when you generalise regarding

nations and their objects, and that is, the impossibility of classing nations in the lump as partisans of any noble object systematically. Take the nobles of each nation, and put an abstract point of honour or of justice to them, and each will with one common consent nobly support it."

"Or of religion, aunt," eagerly observed Annechet; "look to the crusades!"

"That there are noble men in all nations," interposed Merrick, "and that noble natures must sympathise, is true: but that there are circumstances which ennoble a whole people for the time in a mass, as, in this land of France, the spirit of patriot resistance did not so many years ago, is not less certain: how then is your dogma to take effect—as based on moral sympathies, casual circumstances, or innate nobility?"

"Before we dogmatise at all, had we not better understand what exactly we are talking of?" asked the dragoon, who seemed to take interest in a species of conversation he usually avoided in public. Annechet and Merrick laughed at the quiet mode in which the question was put, while Madame de Malguet said —

"Then do you tell us what we each were thinking of, when we spoke?"

“Nay,” replied her nephew, “that were calling on me to do too much, because one or two of us may have been merely speculating on the fulfilment of his or her theoretical fancy, which answers to Mademoiselle’s doll, Merrick’s hobby, or my *cheval de bataille*, which may each in its way be unreal; but Mademoiselle Annechet’s feeling was no doll, nor hobby, nor *cheval* of any class or character, but a reality—the animation which results from sympathy with our fellow-creatures. The good father led us away upon a *feu follet*, a will-o’-the-wisp, for illustration, to the vanity of human wishes, and the extent of national weakness. I tried to revert to the original subject, and Madame and Merrick took partial views of it according to their several impressions.” The speaker paused, for with three of his auditors there was a mute expression of surprise in the look with which they regarded him. Somewhat embarrassed, he added, “If I have spoken more than is my wont, it was in an endeavour to show Mademoiselle I understood her.”

She raised her downcast eyes, and simply answered, “You *do* understand me, Monsieur de la Chalaudre.”

There was a silence. Madame de Malguet found a meaningness in Annechet’s tone, which liked her

not. Merrick felt as though his friend eclipsed him at the only moment in which he would have cared himself for the ascendant. Father Velasquez was like Shakspeare's bowler, whose circuitous cast towards the distant goal "went not unhappily against the bias." The desultory discussion pleased him, as one to be led whither he liked, and he continued it.

"The point is, I take it, as now put, that the greater the amount of true sympathy among mankind that can be produced, the more pleasure excited in generous minds, the stronger the energy created, and the more beneficial its effect to the world at large:—now, as we understand Mademoiselle and the Marquis, this sympathy is not dependent on moral unity, casual circumstances, or innate nobility of character, as suggested by Captain Merrick, but on all of them conjointly. Let us know what common subject, dependent on these points, would most affect men by sympathy for their common benefit?"

So spoke the priest, and each answered after the thought that prevailed dominant in them.

"The love of honour, and the spirit of freedom."

"A chivalric devotion to the good, the noble, and the true."

"Patriotism displayed in self-denial for the common good, and a sense of duty in time of danger."

The dragoon, the lady, and the sailor having given these characteristic answers in succession, Annechet hesitated, and as she did so excused herself of indecision.

“It is the phrase, and not the idea, fails me,” she said; “but surely honour, freedom, devotion, all self-denial, and every duty are comprised and understood in religious feeling.”

“In its active exercise, doubtless,” observed the priest, “good and noble impulses will prevail to unite men’s minds for a time, but the impulse over, the sympathy is gone; there is no moral cohesion possible without the religious element in society; and when the want of it is most apparent, we have wars, treacheries, and divisions, schisms in the church for worldly ends, and revolutions in the state for party purposes; for then the Lord’s vineyard is no longer fenced round, and the beasts of the field rush in, and waste its pleasantness.”

“Dear sister Anastasia!” exclaimed Annechet, “do you remember how piteously she would bewail the defection of Christendom, and from the cause you cite, good father,—when the Infidel broke in and destroyed her beloved Byzantium, and Christ’s church in the East!”

“It is an apposite instance,” said Father Velas-

quez, turning to his auditors, who, perhaps, either not caring to argue, or not in a condition to reply, left the field of declamation to the priest; "the instance is most happy; for, in those days, Italy, whence the head of the church ought to have showered the strength of Europe on the invaders, had scarce recovered the strange sight of the triple crown claimed by three so-called popes, ere the danger of invasion menaced her very coasts; and there were few to defend, and none to avenge, Christendom and the church. Strange that the task of that immediate defence should fall on those people who had most obstinately opposed the Holy See! They refused it, and from that day they never prospered."

"You allude," said Madame de Malguet, "to the Genoese."

"The Genoese, aunt, and the Venetians: the first, sister Anastasia used to say, deserted her ancestor, Constantine (for she was of the Palæologi), when the siege was at the hottest, and their aid most needed, because their leader, Justiniani, was hurt in the hand! The second, who had basely held off from the strife, although their colonies were next to suffer, disgraced themselves by sending the initiatory embassy to the Turk, ere he were settled in his conquest; but,"

she added, "all maritime nations are alike — selfish, cruel, and perfidious!"

"Annechet!" exclaimed Madame de Malguet, with startling vehemence; "say you that before ——"

"Your pardon, madam," interposed the priest with a voice of bland deprecation, "and still more yours, M. Merrick. My dear daughter has but had a glimpse, a little glimpse, of the world, after imbibing ideas for years from enthusiastic persons who had seen nothing of it."

"Nay," said the dragoon, "Merrick does not require explanations to excuse a casual phrase hastily uttered; while I dare say those who deserted of the — the ——"

"Genoese," suggested Annechet.

"Of the Genoese were mercenaries, or mere allies, few in number."

"They were two thousand strong, as Phranza says in his history," observed the nun.

"Two thousand! why twenty times the number could not make head in defence against an active enemy, if the walls were then as I saw them in extent."

"As you saw them, Monsieur de la Chalautre?" inquired Annechet.

“I returned from Egypt by Constantinople and the Isles,” was the reply.

“What! you have seen Cairo, where St. Louis fell, and Pera, where dear sister Anastasia was born, Argos, and Mitylene —— ”

She was interrupted in the excitement of her queries by Madame de Malguet, who, with an expression of annoyance she could not repress, said —

“Captain Merrick, my dear Annechet, has been waiting these five minutes to ask you why the reputation of maritime nations in Europe is of the nature you mention.”

The nun blushed red in the cold moonlight, more with the sense of sorrow for having given pain, than in the consciousness of injustice to those of whom she spoke.

“I beg Captain Merrick’s pardon,” she said, “with my whole heart; but,” looking up dependently on Father Velasquez, “I have been taught always to think, as I have said.”

“’Tis a hard doctrine to inculcate,” observed Merrick, “and to be taught, under your favour, in a convent — hardly a Christian one: will you apply it in France to the Normans?”

“They have ceased to be maritime,” said the priest; “for the rest, as to perfidy, you know their

present reputation in France; as to the Venetians and the Genoese, the former have ever sacrificed Christendom systematically to their own selfish policy; the latter let the doors of the West be wrenched from them while employed in internecine persecutions."

"The Portuguese?"

"Ask Albuquerque of his victories in the East, and read of the conquest of Brazil, unless indeed the history of their alliance with your own people be not enough."

"The Dutch, surely, are a brave and honest people?"

"They have fought for their dykes, and that well, and measured their woollens with a true ell-wand: but for cruelty, what say you to Amboyna? — and that comes home to you — or Surinam, or ——"

"I have done," said Merrick, somewhat disconcerted: "yet once more; leaving the Spaniards out, soldiers at sea, and at sea as soldiers — as some one said of them — what of the English? are they not known as a generous race, champions of the weak, and honest even to roughness?"

There was a moment during which the conversation between Annechet and the dragoon, uninterrupted during the above encounter, was suspended,

and all hung on the priest's words, as he replied with deliberation.

“ So, Captain Merrick, they love to think themselves, insomuch that many take the converse of the last idea, and make roughness the test of honesty: as to their championhood, they have fought, like other people, for others, when it served themselves; but as to the general question, let me ask you, whether you served at the bombardment of Copenhagen, and what you think of its political justice? Was it war, or piracy? Had Nelson been Drake, and the Baltic the Spanish main, which would you have termed it?”

If the sailor was silenced by this sally, in manner so blandly, kindly made, as to disarm resentment, Madame de Malguet was humiliated. Her hero had had the worst of it, where she had anticipated for him an even field, if not a victory: but how to contest a point on which bright eyes have looked their determination, and soft lips firmly spoken words irrevocable? The champion who feels fight his duty, but yet would please her, whose knight he encounters, is crippled ere he can draw his sword; and so was it with the sailor.

After years of toil, danger, obscurity, and penury, and scorn, to sit by night on the terrace of a noble

chateau, with the landscape, plunged in shadow, or bathed in the deceptive moonshine, enhanced thereby in beauty and in vastness; to feel oneself rich, noble, honoured, prosperous, young enough still to enjoy life, yet with experience to avoid its follies; and by one's side a creature, liker the beatific dreams that visited Correggio, and by him stamped with being, were transferred immortally to colour, than aught earthly; to hear her ask of the scenes of perils, and of the strange lands, and stranger men that one had known, and to pour into her listening ear the story of the hard past amid the blessed present! If the dragoon exulted, and if, though he loved his friend not less, the heart within him were glad that the maiden unconsciously eschewed the destiny which earthly scheming had designed for her, it was but the inevitable course of nature, declaring that her son was neither more nor less than man.

The sailor looked upon the pair, and thought of Othello and fair Desdemona: —

“ She loved me for the dangers I had passed,
And I loved her that she did pity them.”

And as the lines with painful iteration beat upon the brain, as in like case some weary speaking passage, hatefully applicable to occasion, will ever obtrude

itself on recollection till one hates the faculty — the demon of Othello's later loves stole into his own heart. Merrick was jealous, as Merrick could be that is, and tried, swallowing the bitter of his own rebuff, not to be mean enough to envy where he could not succeed. The priest in the interim sat gazing upward on the peaceful sky, absorbed in thought, and to all appearance unconscious of what was passing round him ; this calmness, real or affected, formed strong contrast to the tumult that reigned in the bosom of the lady of La Chalaudre. She longed, and at last determined, to break up the interminable tête-a-tête, when Annechet, with her wonted air of infantine unaffectedness, anticipated her.

“ I have been telling Monsieur de la Chalaudre,” she said, “ of the mention of his ancestor in the Byzantine history of Anna Commena, but I cannot recollect whether it were Raoul or Robert, he is named in the chronicle : he was one of the principal of the early French crusaders, but the name is so oddly termed in Greek.”

Had Annechet been, which, God help her, she was not, a woman skilled in human foibles and the world's ways, she could not have more cleverly diverted, than by this turn to the conversation, the latent ire of her relative ; for at all times the family antiquities were

the lady's peculiar weakness, and, appealed to upon them, she was happy.

"At the end of the eleventh century?" she asked: "it was Robert, fifth of the name; he married the heiress of Berlejac to enable him to go on the Crusade. She was a cripple, called Constance la Contrefaite, and pledged the estate to Simeon, the Jew of Troyes, that ——"

"Nay, aunt," objected the nun, still casually, and casually in very deed doing the very thing a knowing woman would have done in the like case; "I must doubt your Robert; for I recollect dear sister Anastasia explaining to me how Raoul was legitimately turned in Greek into somewhat the reverse of itself by the — what is it? — the ——"

"The permutation of vowels," suggested father Velasquez.

"Exactly, — so that the name fixed itself in my mind."

"Tis not too late to look at my chronicle, and set the matter to rest, which, as I know it will be satisfactory to my nephew as representative of the family, I will do at once."

The representative of the family bowed his acknowledgments, feeling in his heart obliged not a little to his ancestor of doubtful memory, for the pro-

longation of an intercourse rife to him with a charm in women, the existence of which the soldier had not hitherto conceived, the winning and all subduing trustfulness of innocence. The lady of La Chalaudre rose, and sought her room, but in the shadow of the great hall entrance, a dark figure stopped her. It was Brigitta, the ever watchful.

“The notary waits for you, *celenza*; he has been walking up and down your *salon* wearily enough this hour past.”

“I will see him, but on the terrace after they are gone; meanwhile, light and my keys.”

And thus again the tête-a-tête began in spite of an attempt that Merrick made to ask the history of this sister Anastasia, who so constantly and pervadingly seemed to have influenced the life and opinions of fair Annechet. His question put in that unassured voice that vexes man when they would assume indifference, reached not the hearing, full of other accents, for which it was intended; but Father Velasquez was prompt to listen to the query, and deluge the querist with a torrent of curious useless information,—how Johannes Palæologus, coming to solicit aid from the European courts against the Turks, had brought with him sundry of his family as emissaries in places to which he could not go himself,—how one

of them left the Western heresies for the true church, when Pope Eugene—and so forth.

It was while Merrick was entangled in the thick and mazy flood of this worthless and obscure history, that Madame de Malguet returned. She bore in her hand a ponderous MS. folio, which doubtless decided, or did not, the question of the nomenclature of that early scion of La Chalaute who married Constance la Contrefaite, in order that, like a wise man, he might take leave of her on the wings of her own property. Father Velasquez was perhaps, like Dogberry, impatient of all tediousness other than his own; for, while the matter at issue was yet uncertain, he suggested the lateness of the hour. It was midnight, the midday of the moon. Fair Annechet arose, and said —

“The excitement of happiness has passed away, but I feel a calm, happier than excitement.”

She walked down the terrace, as if to enjoy the tranquil beauty of the night, and the sensation of mental repose alone. Madame de Malguet pored still over her MS., in which she tried to excite an attention, which Merrick even could not give. The dragoon sat silent in his usual attitude, when abstracted; while the priest followed the motions of the nun of Bruges, as though his searching eye could,

through the veil of night, read in them the index to her heart's affection.

“Hush!” he said at last, “listen! she sings!”

Annechet leaned on the terrace balustrade, her hands clasped, while the rich deep tones of her voice, as if encouraged by their own beauty, swelled to a louder and yet, in their fulness, a sweeter strain, as her song proceeded. It was a devotional roundelay in quaint old French, such as in his earlier days Clement Marot might have written, or, in latter time, one of his worser imitators ventured to produce. The air was sweet and solemn, to which the words might have run thus —

“Throughout the realms of boundless space,
A might creative bids us trace
The presence of its power :
Speaks in the ardent blaze of day,
Or when men's hearts do God-ward stray
In still and midnight hour.
Oh! hear it in the sound of life
That fills the crowded town,
Or the deep roar of mortal strife
Sweeping the strong man down :—
Or song of birds, or wind-tossed trees,
Or rills, or waves :—for they
Are vocal all with melodies
That make us sing and pray.”

She ceased, and there was a solemn pause, as after

the act of prayer: then with gestures of silent farewell, as if to speak would have jarred on the soul to the crushing of some holy spell, they separated.

Yet not all; for the dragoon found himself invited to linger behind the rest by a slight pressure on the arm.

“I have to speak with you in the presence of a third party, Monsieur de la Chalaudre,” the lady said; “he has been summoned, and our short conference will not rob you of many minutes of your night’s rest.”

And with the words, the Calabrese appeared, bringing with her Finot. The three were seated, and Madame de Malguet began calmly and clearly to state her reasons for requiring this nightly consultation. She recapitulated the story of her relations with Merrick, dwelt on the loved theme of her obligations to him, and the cherished project nearest to her heart; and ended by asking her nephew, the nearest of her kin and the head of her house, first, and next, her oldest and most devoted servant, whether in this last instance, as in the previous endeavours to attain it, she had not been guided and encouraged by their advice. The query fell like a dull reproach on the ear of the baffled schemer, while with the dragoon it painfully awakened a sense of the cul-

pable and almost stupid indifference with which he had assented to the plausible views of the notary in confirming the recommendation suggested by him. However the answer was inevitable. Finot gave it by a grave acquiescent inclination of the head and body, wordlessly ; the dragoon by an abrupt assent, half-muttered.

“ Then, as my advisers, you should aid me in the execution of the scheme you counselled,” observed the lady.

The notary either acquiesced again, or made a gesture which meant nothing. The dragoon was mute.

“ You, Monsieur de la Chalaudre, in particular, from your influence with your friend, and your station at the head of the family, have the power to further the object in view : now, in your hearts, both of you, do you think it is in a fair way of attainment ? ”

With eyes carefully fixed on the ground, the notary observed that the position of things did not warrant the formation of an opinion. As Madame de Malguet turned from him with impatience, the marquis stood up with dignity and answered, —

“ I do not think so : — Mademoiselle de Malguet has imbibed prejudices against Merrick, as I found in

course of conversation, which it will take time to remove. He can best do so himself, and it shall be my care that he has the opportunity, and that amply. For the counsel I gave respecting this scheme, it was given ignorantly in the first place, and thoughtlessly in the second, and carelessly in both. What had my life taught me of marriage save that, in *our* day, the rich wife as well as the marshal's baton was the reward of the brave and of the fortunate? — and nothing seemed to me more natural than that the friends of a good man should find him a fair bride with an ample dowry." He paused awhile, then added, "If I have helped to cause embarrassment, its removal shall be my duty. Good night, madame, and you, sir, also."

He touched the lady's hand with his lips, and withdrew. Madame de Malguet would have spoken further, but the notary, in somewhat of a peevish tone, that age and weariness excused, or sanctioned the affectation of, remarked —

"Good counsel is no cover against the dews, madame; what's done, is done; — matters must take their course, — and as it's late, let us in."

Lie down, thou schemer, and in the satisfaction of a prosperous result to thee and thine, forget the troubles that thy plans have wrought for others!

The lady, too, seeks sleep; but it is to dream of seas, as that of life, strewn with the wreck of her affections, on which she tries to steer the argosy freighted with her last hopes,—the gale against her,—disappointment the lee-shore, towards which the deeply labouring vessel surges. He that was Lambert slumbers not, or little, the night long: to have won a height, and spare to seize the unexpected spoil that lies there,—’tis hard!—and so he thought. The priest watched long, read deep, prayed fervently, slept lightly: thoughtful, studious, devout, temperate,—having his plan withal, *ad majorem Dei gloriam*.

There were two beneath that roof on whose eyes sleep fell, as nature’s blessings should do, upon honesty and innocence; yet, alas! one distrusted, and the other despaired.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE rising spire of St. Ursule des Fonds was barely capped with the first gleam of sunlight, when Annechet stood at its base, plan and pencil in hand, watching the carving of the pinnacle she had sketched the morning previous. The best part of its working hours had been lost, and she urged the willing masons to make amends by toiling double tides in the holy work. The excitement of the happy festival, prolonged so late into the night, had left no trace of languor or fatigue upon her features: it seemed, on the contrary, as if a livelier grace accompanied her actions, the spirit within her being roused to a readier activity by the stimulating warmth of social intercourse.

Father Velasquez found her busied in the pious labour of tracing out the ground-plan of what had been the dwelling of the *curé* near the little church. Two labourers, with crowbar and pickaxe, followed her intelligent directions, as, led by the inequalities in the surface of the turf, she struck out the lines of

the long-levelled walls, and after, with a sort of fancy, laid out the interior economy of the humble building by what she thought might have been its domestic divisions.

“So, daughter,” said the good man, in his bland and flattering tone, “the comforts of His poor servants occupy you next to the reinstatement of His altar: if the tenement be intended for that most unworthy one who now speaks to you, he too may boast of having been ministered to on earth by the semblance of angels.”

“And for whom else should the labour be, save for you, good father?” asked the nun of Bruges, who took his holy flattery as one who, having been taught to look on those with whom she had lived as angels on earth, thought vaguely that their spiritual child might, while engaged in heavenly toil, be typically spoken of as their congener.

“For whom? for others, perhaps, than me. Is this a kingdom in which the uncompromising servants of the church can hope to stand, as yet, unsupported by the secular arm and by secular favour? The land is yet in the hands of the spawn of revolutionary heathendom, as respects the middle classes and the people; the great ones, who return to scramble for their own, dream of mammon, and think not

of the altar ; the soldier-nobles of Imperial France are sullenly or servilely obedient ; and few of them"—(and here he glanced aside to watch the effect of his words)—“few of them are in the way to assume an influential position, as regards church or state, unwatched or unsuspected ;—who is to officiate *here*, do I ask ? who is certain of lifting up his voice in the sacrifice of the mass anywhere in this land unscoffed at and unreviled ?”

“But, father, these are needless fears as regards this humble garden of the Lord ; my aunt ——”

“Your aunt !” rejoined the priest ; “is she sole mistress here ?—her tenure of the estate is but by sufferance ;—her own opinions are, religiously, all sceptical ;—the heir and real owner of the land we stand upon is a republican soldier of the empire ;—and the counsellor and intimate friend of both is an English heretic, indifferent to, if not neglectful of, all religion. For whom, then,” continued the priest solemnly, “for whom, my daughter, build you up yon house ?”

“For Him,” was the reply, “who in good season will, I believe, thereto appoint his minister.”

“Thou hast said well,” rejoined the disconcerted Jesuit ; “yet, according to the arm of the flesh, see

you no present help against a possible discomfiture of our hopes in this small vineyard?"

"Help, father? — in what way?"

"Listen, my daughter: might not the proud heart be brought to the thralldom of godly conduct by loving that which should form it to good ways?"

The young girl considered: then, in a perplexed, half-frightened manner, replied —

"My comprehension follows you not, good father."

"No wonder, my child; I speak to you the language of the world; let me," added he, with a conciliatory persuasiveness that it would have been difficult to withstand when mutual confidences were to be interchanged; "let me address you in other terms, more be seeming to be used between us."

They sat down on the pedestal of the ruined font, which, as often in country places, was set without the church; Annechet crouched gracefully on the lowest step, the priest so placed above her that he could look into her up-turned countenance, not altogether without regard to that craving for effect which those of his church have been accused of yielding to: a graceful failing, if it be one, and a harmless,—at times, too, not without its use.

"My child," said Father Velasquez, "do you reflect that you have a lot in life to fulfil?"

“ ’Tis less, father,” she answered, “ than a year, since all the old purposes of life, as I was taught to look upon it, have been swept away ; and stepping from a cloister into the world, I have been as yet too much dazzled — shall I say it ? — too happy, for reflection.”

“ You would not be the bride of Heaven, because ” — and the churchman paused.

“ Because I thought others assumed a right to judge for me, and left me not to mine own election.”

“ You told me so, my child, or, which is the same thing, I extracted the truth from you ; and in that case advised you to brave the perils and temptations of the world, under safe guidance always spiritually, rather than consecrate your life to spiritual ends at human bidding, which is a desecration of sanctity ; but you — ’tis woman’s lot, my daughter — must fulfil your destiny, in this or that way.”

“ How, father ? ”

“ If not Heaven’s bride, fair child, on earth,” said Father Velasquez, sinking his voice to a tone of parental tenderness, “ you must be man’s.”

“ *Must* be, father ? ” breathed, rather than uttered, the trembling girl.

“ Nay, I said not *must*, or, if I did use the word without the expression, I meant but *ought* : co-

ercion is always out of place, in spiritual things and also in worldly ones ; but in the matter of which we speak, election is easier in the latter than in the former."

" I do not catch your meaning," whispered Annechet, in the same irresolute voice.

" Election to the bridehood of Heaven, of woman's free will, is her most glorious state on earth, but that state is one ; whereas earthly bridehoods be many. If she that wills herself an earthly bride, think of her lot, in time, and fix her choice where it may rest most worthily, in time, she may elect freely, and escape coercion ; but if ——"

" Escape coercion, father ! what coercion, and how exercised ?"

" The coercion of her free will by circumstance, by opportunity, by the indirect influences which grow out of the habits of a settled life ; by the bent her mind takes in the society of particular persons ; circumstance alters, life unsettles, habits change, and men and women depart or die ; and the irrevocable choice that these have brought about must still, still be, like a faded garment that must still be worn for decency, if not for comfort."

" And can people then coerce one unperceived ?"

" As those Indians take the deer, my child, who

scorn the coarse and artless chase, but along the wonted paths the unsuspecting animals must follow in search of pasture or of water, hang gaudy feathers on long cords, that dance and whirl as the wind blows: — amused, curious, and yet afraid, the creatures dare not pass the line that hems them in on either side with trifles, till, where the lines cross, lies the trap, and they are taken.”

Annechet mused long, as the words entered into her mind, never therefrom to be erased. At last, sighing deeply, she said —

“And so this pleasant world is full of pitfalls!”

“The world, dear child, is as God made it; and through it He will guide those unharmed that trust in Him! But a truce to serious conversation; you can think at leisure, and commune with your own heart: I want to know your opinion of our new inmates; what think you of Captain Merrick, your dear aunt’s friend?”

“I have thought nothing of him yet,” was the calm reply, “save that he *is* my aunt’s friend.”

“He is, as a foreigner, and a man of some remarkable adventure, not unworthy study; amiable too to excess evidently, and candid even to his own discomfiture. The Marquis again,” added the priest, with his side glance at Annechet, “is one of our French

sabreurs of the better kind, who becomes his elevation with a very decent degree of military reserve."

"He," began the nun of Bruges, then checked herself, and said simply, "Father, is it not late? I see some horsemen coming over the hill, the foremost of whom looks like the Marquis; shall we go home to breakfast,—or—would you like it here as usual? I can send for it."

"Nay," rejoined the churchman, "we must deny ourselves our woodland breakfasts now, and go through the ceremonies of the hall;" and with these words they moved on to the chateau, one or two master-workmen following for the orders usually given during the morning meal at the chapel.

The dragoon, who in pursuance of a determination arrived at during the watches of the night, had ridden out early to visit the home circle of his property, was returning across the hill from Fourrebois, when his tall figure as he topped the eminence, clearly defined against the morning sky, caught Annechet's eye; nor when she emerged with her companion from the close screen of the coppice about the chapel, was he less slow to observe the figures moving along the path on the other side the valley, whose identity there could be little doubt of. If ever the dragoon looked well, it was on horseback; and if he were ever guilty of

an approach to conceit as to personal appearance, it was when in the saddle. Making a slight detour, to avoid the worst parts of the ravine ground, he rode boldly and steadily at a pace which was his safety though it seemed his risk, across the stony banks and hollows, which, treacherously covered with scrubby copse-wood, extended some distance down the valley, and ere the breathless girl could dream the feat were done, reined up his panting horse beside her. Excited by the gallop, there was the flash of youthful daring in his eye, while, poised in the saddle, his figure looked less heavy, and did not belie the expression of his countenance. It was the first time Annechet had ever seen a horse well ridden, and, struck by the contrast which his followers offered to himself, pointed, after answering his salutation, not unanxiously down the valley towards them.

“How could you, Monsieur de la Chalaudre, run such risk yourself, or tempt those poor people after you! Look: Who is that that has dismounted, and is leading his horse up and down that uneven ground?”

“It is Josse,” replied the dragoon, with a cheery soldier’s laugh at the idea of danger;—“the poor old man thinks it his duty to follow, as he may; but Pierrefeu, as they tell me he is named, the keeper, who has given himself brevet rank as yeoman pricker

on the establishment, does, you see, better on the wall-eyed brute he is riding, and comes handsomely along in emulation of his leader. Merrick though, were he here, would laugh us all to scorn."

"Does he ride so well then, that English sailor?" asked Annechet.

And on the question the dragoon spoke forth the praises of his friend. He had pledged himself to the fulfilment of a duty, and he performed it with a sort of enthusiastic exactitude. The honest and affectionate nature of the man, when roused to the recollection of the services, inestimable in amount, which the sailor had rendered him, poured itself forth in an earnest, if not eloquent, flow of feeling language. But it would have been difficult to say whether the tale, or its narrator, produced most effect upon the nun of Bruges. With expression on her lips, as she listened, in which the force of sympathy rather exceeded the fervency of commendation, she pursued her way, the dragoon walking dismounted by her side, with less eagerness, an observer might have thought, to encounter the object of his eulogium, than to hear the praises the speaker uttered for the sake of him that spoke them.

The breakfast over, Madame de Felingue and the Finot party gone, commenced a day which, as

the type of aught eventive at La Chalaudre might have stood for some ten or twelve of its successors. The Marquis, when the meal was over, and his guests despatched, mounted a fresh horse and rode forth in some further perquisition over his property. He returned late, dined in his own room, and after a half hour spent with the ladies and with Merrick, retired again to his apartment, and devoted the evening to deep study of records and accounts in company with old Josse, whose delight at finding metal in his lord so congenial with his own, could only be equalled by the zeal with which he almost over-sated the Marquis's desire for information. Two or three days of the above period were spent by the dragoon away from La Chalaudre altogether. An estate, called Rennes-les-marais, some sixteen miles distant, had been for forty years, tradition said, unvisited by one of the family; and thither went he, and there again bought golden opinions from his tenantry by his justice, liberality, and plain, yet dignified, manners.

Meanwhile Merrick had, as his friend declared, at La Chalaudre, ample occasion for redeeming himself from whatsoever shade prejudice might have cast over his honest nature, in the opinion of one whom he certainly by no means wished to stand ill with.

It must not be understood, however, that the sailor used his opportunity obtrusively. On the contrary, it was perhaps the delicate way in which he avoided making use of those approaches towards intimacy with the fair nun of Bruges, which his position as the friend of the house authorised, that mainly in the first instance tended to raise him in her estimation. He sought the society of Madame de Malguet and her niece only when invited so to do, and even then there was an absence in him of that genial tone and temper which formed so marked a characteristic of the man in his ordinary habits of being. The truth was making itself felt with him, as it must have done with every man of generous mind placed in a like position; and first, in that invincible constraint which sat upon his faculties while in the presence of fair Annechet. In company with a creature so admirable, and whom he so much admired, with many congenial tastes, with much power of conversation, and anxious always to converse, accomplished and attractive in all ways, why should he feel incapable of either enjoying her society, or of doing justice in her eyes to himself? Why should every friendly effort of the lady of La Chalaudre fail to draw him out? Why, after longing to find himself an inmate of the morning room — the companion

of the ladies in their walks and drives — should the domestic elegance of the apartment pall upon him, the book he read aloud lose its interest, the topic started die away in words and suggest no idea to communicate, nor thought to interchange? He almost — nay, he did love Annechet de Malguet the first day he saw her, in so far as that feeling deserves the name of love, which consists in the urgent impulse to admire, the thrill of fascination, and the longing to know and be liked by a being so beautiful and attractive; and yet from day to day he found that this feeling, so far from growing upon him and ripening into attachment, resolved itself into an unaccountable depression, that worked upon him as has been above attempted to be described. If, once or twice, roused by the subject of their converse, and stimulated by the challenge or retort of Madame de Malguet, Merrick showed to advantage for a time, the result was unfortunate, as it led him into one of those exuberant ebullitions of spirits, which befit a man only in the company of his few intimate friends, and before whose joyousness the loves and graces fly, stopping their ears. I have mentioned this failing in the sailor, and here it was unlucky; for let a man be old, or ugly (that is nothing), or rude, or rough, or unlearned, or let him possess in short any

unit or even two of the great sum of human defects, he may yet find a woman to love him — if he does not make her think him ridiculous. I mean not to apply the term to Merrick; but as to some natures exuberant merriment is offensive, — and Annechet was of these, — they may find an equivalent to that term, in what is to most of us the mere overflow of the heart, amiable, and though untimely, not absurd.

But at Merrick's heart the while lay the thought, “Fair and exquisite being, is a man worthy of you who meanly comes to seek fortune by a *mariage de convenance*?” And thus the noble nature of the sailor, acting as, in physics, do certain bodies when in contact round pure water, froze up the fount of love so soon as chilling interest touched it.

And Annechet? She found the sailor gentle and amiable; and useful indeed, when in the long forest drives which she and Madame de Malguet took in a pony phaeton—the Marquis's present to his aunt — his steady hand was available to extricate them from difficulties, and his quiet voice helped to calm her terror in imaginary dangers: then as he rode beside them, and told of the forests of other lands, or, in short, found in the open air topics before her eyes for illustration and improvement, she liked him, although failing to detect the infinite superiority in him of

which Madame de Malguet spoke, or the value of those sterling qualities on which Monsieur de la Chalaudre so much insisted. It was strange that the idea of coercion seemed in these rides, and walks, and drives to leave her ; as if the freedom of the blessed air, the glorious expanse of Heaven, and the penetrating rays of golden light, were sureties against the existence of a secret power working to guide, to influence, or subvert ; but in the house, and most of all in the confinement of her own chamber, the thing seemed to come home to her, and become, as it were, palpable. The coercion of circumstances, the coercion of propinquity and of opportunity — these secret bugbears of her imagination, fiends conjured up there by the priest — haunted her pillow and disturbed her prayer. Father Velasquez too was away ; he had left the château for a few days (he said) not many hours after that conversation — not perhaps unlike the skilful forcer of rare seeds that, planting them, leaves them in heat and darkness, refusing in his craft to uncover the precious deposit till the germ have sprouted and the plant be grown. And she should choose — should make her own election before these silent influences worked upon her. Had she, her thoughts excited to the subject, unconsciously already made her choice ?

What with the dread implanted in her, and the doubts suggested to her, amid her perplexity, fair Annechet was hardly less constrained, or more unlike her natural self, than was the sailor.

And she, the framer of this strange combination? The framer of the scene of mimic life may take his troop of human puppets, and say: "Be you the lover, you the lady — you the rival — you, fond — you, cruel — you, repentant; and, at the last, let all of you be happy:" and thus may he teach man from himself how his life goes. The highest human mind that has lived on earth (for what we know) did this, and did it nobly, The cautious politician may lead nations to dependence, or force them to antagonism, saying, "you shall be served, and therefore serve; you, forced to fight, and yield." The wisest men have done so, and often well. The merchant again may rule markets, and raise fictitious famines and false gluts, desiring some to starve awhile that he may be rich for ever, and cheating others with the mockery of plenty. Many try this, more or less wisely, and some succeed. The artificial masses of society which man has formed may be ruled and schooled by men, as the playwright schools and rules man's imitators; but, in our moral being, there is a higher destiny at work than that which human in-

fluence devises. And, indeed, I never saw one in his or her right judgment set about practising upon it. There will be always found a blind before such a person, of passion or interest. He begins blindly, and continues blind, thinking he sees what is not; and so was it with the lady of La Chalaudre. The dragoon absented himself — one cause of dread was gone; Velasquez was away, and this was better still; Merrick and Annechet met, and talked; and then were silent and constrained, as is the way with people (she had heard) who fall in love. So she sighed, and tried to think her plan successful.

It was nearly three weeks after the dragoon had adopted his system of daily absence, and the pretext for it was beginning to wear out, the farms and villages in this part of the country having nearly all been visited, when one morning, soon after sunrise, as he issued from his room, he found the sailor, leaning out of the window on the landing place, gazing at the swans as they gambolled on the mere. He was dressed in a dark riding coat, and boots and breeches.

“Merrick!” exclaimed the Marquis, — “*bottes à revers, et culottes fabuleuses!* — why, what English hobby are you going to ride now, *mon brave!*”

“Nothing but your bay horse, Monte-au-Ciel, as

Pierrefeu calls him," replied the sailor with a quiet smile; "I want exercise, and am come to spend the day with you."

"Exercise? *palsambleru!* you'll get that, and enough of it, if you intend riding that rearing brute; but, in all sober earnest, what is this, my good friend? you said nothing of this intention before I left the drawing-room yesterday evening, and now you come upon me like an apparition."

"That displeases you?"

The dragoon carried the handle of his whip to his lips, as if it had been the cane; but as the Beresina march was not to be awakened on that uncongenial instrument, he gave vent to his thoughts in words, but in his old abrupt manner —

"No: that is, no and yes; or, yes and no, as you will."

There was in the tone of this equivocal reply enough to irritate a man already ill at ease with himself — half jealous of the individual who addressed him — and who, coming in his need to seek friendly confidence, met with a sort of bantering rebuff. Merriek's pride was roused, and he replied without further reflection —

"Then I have stayed a day too long here, Monsieur de la Chalaute, and, thank heaven! but *one*

under a roof where I am now unwelcome: I thought to go, and ought to have gone, twenty-four hours back."

"Take a last morning's ride with me, Captain Merrick," replied the dragoon, altering his manner on Merrick's altered tone, and speaking as he would to a superior officer on parade with grave but semi-deferential stiffness, — "as a last favour," he added, seeing the sailor hesitate, in deep offence — "we will ride first and then talk;" there was another pause: "may I, under my own roof, beg this?"

The sailor bowed, and they descended the stairs together, but in silence. At the foot of the terrace stairs were their horses, Josse, Pierrefeu, and one or two mounted servants in attendance. Following exactly the motions of the dragoon, Merrick mounted after trying his girths in haste, and both putting their horses in motion, rode smartly down the avenue.

"As 'tis our last ride together, Captain Merrick," said Monsieur de la Chalautre, "show me, I pray you, how you ride those Irish races you have so often told me of; it will leave me one more reason to remember you by."

Merrick looked down the valley at the wide champaign before them, and smiled internally at the

idea of a Galway squireen transported thither, and told to exhibit his neck-or-nothing national sport (so popular since in England) across a country unenriched by a single place he might hope to break his neck at. Resolved, however, to display the pleasures of the contest in all their primitive simplicity, he pointed to a distant spire that cut the far horizon miles away, and directed his companion to make at his best pace straight for that object, and stop when he could go no further. Then shouting "Off," to which the dragoon rejoined in his deep voice of command, "*Pas de charge*," the sailor scoured away at the best pace his horse was master of, and stirrup to stirrup, at his side, galloped his mute companion. Pierrefeu was the only one of their train that achieved a feeble attempt to follow: mounted on wall-eyed Rollo, he shoved that respectable animal along for a mile or so; then from a rising ground, on which he halted, shading his eyes with his hand, he watched the rapidly retreating forms of the mounted men, dashing through crop or stubble, copse or clover, now lost a moment in some hollow of the undulating plain, now rising as their horses took a ditch or brook, and at last reduced to two little black specks, skirring away across the yellow surface of the harvests, until in the distance

distinguishable no longer. Then did Pierrefeu in deep astonishment turn back, making the groves of La Chalaute vocal with the most elaborate complication of *sacrés* on record as uttered in those pastoral regions.

They must have gone a good six miles, and at a killing pace, before either horse showed symptoms of distress, and still side by side, and straight as an arrow for the feathery spire that now loomed larger and more distinct, but yet a distant object from them. Monte-au-Ciel, that carried Merrick, first flagged; but still a vigorous application of the spur carried him on, but reeling now and then, and hard to hold together. A piece of low land, still swampy, despite the excessive heat of the summer, lay in a bottom just before them, and wistfully the sailor eyed the better ground on either side, which he might not betake him to, as "straight for the steeple" was the word. His blood was up, for he had been angry; or else, perhaps, he might have spared the blown and weary beast this last struggle; but beaten, if 'twere possible, he would not be, and as the dragoon's weight and length of limb began to tell against the better horse whom his mode of riding did not assist, as did the Englishman's the animal he mounted, there were just hopes the marsh might stop

either or the other. In the midst, however, of the broken plashy ground Monte-au-Ciel blundered, failed to recover himself, and fell heavily; while the dragoon, extricating his horse at a slower pace from the swamp, was able to canter slowly up the rising ground, behind which he disappeared, leaving Merrick standing ankle deep in mud and water.

Now the sailor having a sort of old-fashioned handiness about him, and a way of carrying odd and useful things after a mode even then fast disappearing, produced from his capacious pocket-book a fleam, and having bled and restored the horse a little, led him out of the swamp and up the ascent in search of his companion, or at any rate of some farm-house where he might get assistance. On reaching the crown of the gently swelling eminence, he looked down upon a broad and fertile valley, enlivened about its centre by a busy crowd of some thousands of men, engaged along a line of excavation stretching miles away to the right, while to the left, at perhaps a league's distance, rose the spires and towers of Plassy. A busier, nor a pleasanter scene to one that loves his kind could scarce be witnessed: the plenteous harvests waving on the uplands, while below, amid glowing furnace and smouldering kiln, the human emmets toil to fill the cornucopia fuller

still, although no plough be wanted for their labour. About a hundred yards down the slope sat, by the side of a pleasant coppice, fragrant with the scents of summer, the dragoon, busied like Merrick in surveying the scene: he was in his shirt sleeves, his coat being spread over his horse's reeking loins, as, unbridled and unsaddled, the animal snuffed up with distended nostril the cool morning breeze. He turned suddenly as Merrick approached, and pointed to the town.

“ On the quay yonder you shed your blood for me, and for mine: beneath those trees we lay when your counsels first aroused me from my fatal sloth; — and see! there is the work whereby you made me what I am, — 'tis your canal, Merrick! How like you the goal of our steeple-chase, — and will you quarrel with me now?”

The sailor shook hands with him, his eyes averted, as he gazed upon the spirit-stirring scene before him.

“ Bah!” exclaimed the dragoon, as he threw himself in great enjoyment on the sward by the coppice, while Merrick turned to unsaddle, and refresh his horse; “ I wanted a good gallop, — so did you: it clears the head, and sets the spirits right, and takes one suddenly away into new places;” then, rare and uncommon feat for him — for as Kelly said of

Sheridan, "he could only growl a tune at you without notes, but you knew what he meant" — he sang — it was some fragment of a barrack ditty.

"Les pèr' des Dieux dit, — Par ma vie !
L'homme est trop heureux pour le coup —
Envoyons lui femme jolie,
Pour lui mettre tout sans d'sus d'sous."

"Oh! Merrick, my good friend, what could have made you misunderstand my 'no and yes,' but the influence of the sweet cause of all that is sour — the sub-acetate, as La Fosse would say, of social existence? You displeased me, *no*, because your presence is always pleasant to me; — you displeased me, *yes*, because your place was elsewhere than waiting at my door in boots and breeches: why are you not wooing your wife ——"

"Wooing her that is destined to be yours," replied Merrick; "what need between us two of forms and phrases? I was jealous of you, and you gave way, and I have made no progress! there is the plain fact. I could not make my way in such a case; love for money, and in cold blood, for I find it is cold blood with me, and stand between you and happiness, manœuvred into matrimony with an unwilling bride! I have been sick of my position, but

know not how to break it to the lady yonder, who seems unconscious of the state of things."

"She swears that Annechet cares for you."

"She deceives herself."

"'Tis you that cannot see! *Palsambleu!* man; nuns are but women after all, and if they will turn worldly, must be wooed as women are."

"You jest, my friend," rejoined Merrick; "but 'tis not from your heart; and neither empty jest (pardon me, but I speak seriously) nor snatches of old song will hide your thoughts from me: you care more for Mademoiselle de Malguet than you choose to allow, and she ——"

"*Halte-là!* — this is so new a kind of creature to me, that I cannot hear her spoken of with reference to myself in the style you were about to use. I do *not* jest," continued the soldier gravely, "when I say, that on the first vision of that being, following thoughts of which you are aware respecting my newly-attained wealth, I did see, despite my knowledge and participation in the scheme for you, visions of —— Bah! I'll go to Paris, get me a wife, and let an heir come as God pleases!"

The sailor shook his head.

"That tone does not ring true metal still; I repeat to you that my chance, if ever I had any, of

pleasing in that quarter is gone ; that, moreover, I have not the wish, had I the power, to please, and that, in a word, I believe her to be ——”

“ Again I stop you,” cried the dragoon, stamping his foot, half in emphasis, half in anger ; “ I have Madame de Malguet’s solemn word that she loves you ! ”

“ Come, and judge for yourself,” was the cool reply.

It had apparently singular effect in moderating the unusual irritability of the Marquis : with a sudden transition, he resumed his tone of careless jesting.

“ Come, forsooth, say you ? and how ? Monte-au-Ciel has belied his name, and given you a tumble, and me the race ; —you’ve bled him by the way I see ? thanks ; —and as for my poor Grodno there, he’s blowing still in emulation of one of the furnaces down yonder : let’s saddle them and lead them down to Papa Fallais, across the valley ; he’ll put them up and give us other horses, or something at least to carry us.”

The friends descended the slope, viewed, unrecognised, the works in progress which they had planned themselves, and before two hours were over, were on the way back to La Chalaudre at paces as subdued as might fall within the powers of Papa Fallais’ cob for

the Marquis, and a plough horse, promoted to the saddle, for the sailor.

During their absence from the chateau, which they did not regain till close upon an hour before noon, events had happened, in the arrival of Finot the notary from Plassy, and Father Velasquez from the place whither he had been, wherever that was. He made his first appearance at the little chapel at an early hour, by what conveyance, or from what direction, did not appear; only in his hand he held a staff, and by his dress would seem to have walked some distance. The good man found fair Annechet, as usual, busied with her workmen. Her unaffected joy at seeing him return, the eager mode in which she recounted what had passed since his departure, and the manner in which she spoke with indifference of dangers the priest had dreaded, reassured him. The seed had taken root, the plant was flourishing; and, certain of the fact, the worthy man proceeded to indulge in dark allusions to the fruition of the hopes of the Seigneur of La Chalautre, assuming even a prophetic air when he presaged the certainty of their early fulfilment. Proceeding to the house, they found on the very heels of the prophecy, the notary, with intelligence that the right and title of Jean François de La Chalautre, long known as

Pierre Lambert, legitimate son of, &c. &c. &c., to that ancient Marquisate, together with all, each, and several, the lands, castles, domaines, houses, &c. &c. &c., of or belonging to the head of that ancient family, were acknowledged, admitted, approved, and by royal mandate confirmed to him and his heirs for ever.

“And his heirs for ever,” repeated Father Velasquez. The words struck Annechet’s ear, and with a vague recurrence, haunted her for hours after.

Meanwhile the absentees arrived, the joyous news was communicated, and all with a sense of happiness unalloyed, sat down to the first meal at which a real Lord of La Chalaudre had held the head of his own table for not far from half a century. It passed off in that sort of quiet conversation, redolent of a subdued and chastened tone of joy, which has in it something approaching to the affectionate. Indeed the party found themselves so well together that, as by tacit consent, they broke not up for the ordinary morning occupations. Finot brought in his papers to the Marquis,—Merrick settled himself like a true Englishman to the perusal of the Paris journals, while Father Velasquez, seated by the ladies, recounted items of intelligence and the current reports in French and European politics with his usual flow of pleasing

diction. Paris, the fountain head of such reports, seemed to Madame de Malguet to have been, by his conversation, the secret object of the good man's journey; and, linking this fact, under the known influence of the priestly party about the court, with the simultaneous acknowledgment of her nephew's rights, the lady was beset by secret misgivings which made her regret the day that Merrick's destined bride brought with her a personage apparently so powerful as well as so mysterious.

Having exhausted his own budget of news, Father Velasquez turned to Merrick, and asked him of the contents of the papers—perhaps in the spirit of a connoisseur in the arts, who, knowing far more than he will say, loves to contemplate the errors, and triumph over the ignorance of the tyro.

“What news?” replied Merrick; “rumours of revolutionary movements in Spain, and a sort of intimation that this country is to interfere to preserve the legitimate order of things there.”

“Heavens! are we to have more war!” exclaimed Madame de Malguet; “I am sick of war and soldiering, of which France has had enough, and too much.”

“And strange to say,” observed the sailor, as continuing the lady's remark, “after all the evil she has

suffered, the people of the land seem just as hot as ever in the cause of national glory, and their favourite profession ! not a popular poem, play, or novel, — those things whereby you feel the pulses of the public mind — but makes its interest tell by reference to a military subject.”

“ Do you not confuse political allusions with this supposed soldierly mania ? ” inquired the priest ; “ there is a good deal of treasonous matter that vents itself in this garb.”

“ There may be,” said the Marquis, looking up from the legal document before him ; “ but there is a vast deal more mere fanfaronnade : consider who these field-of-glory gentlemen are — our old *grogneurs* of former days ? — no, faith, — a sort of ninny-hammers who want excitement, that’s all, and to play at soldiers.”

“ Nay,” interposed Merrick, his spirits rising at the recollection, “ that is so true, that the very people laugh at their own selves. Do you recollect, Colonel, at the Vaudeville —— ”

“ Bah ! man ; you know I never go to a play-house.”

“ You do not ? ” interrupted Annechet, with some surprise ; and the priest and herself interchanged a silent look of approval.

“ Give me no credit, pray : — the droll plays make one melancholy, and the sad ones sleepy ; but you were saying, Merrick ? ”

“ No ; ’twas not at the Vaudeville, I recollect, but at your friend’s house, the ex-carabinier colonel with the pretty wife ; — Potier, the actor, was there when this military mania was mentioned — do you remember ? ” and in his glee of heart the sailor laughed.

“ His account of the patriotic couplets ? — yes, an amusing bit of practical satire enough,” replied the Marquis.

“ But why enjoy the joke and spare to tell it us ? ” asked the Lady of La Chalaute.

“ If,” observed the priest under his breath, “ it be indeed fit to retail before ladies.”

“ The thing sounds so absurd that from its very absurdity I hesitated to mention it ; the matter was simply, that an actor having to sing a martial and patriotic sentiment conveyed in the neat verse of a vaudeville couplet, and finding his memory treacherous, signed to the orchestra to play as loud an accompaniment as they could, and gallantly addressed the audience as follows to the air of *Préville et Taconnet* : —

‘ Ta ta ta ta ta la trompette

Poum, poum, poum, poum, poum, poum ses appas,

Tan ta ran tan ta ran puis se jette
Ratanplan au milieu des combats :
Alors pan pan pan la victoire
Enfin ratanplan ses succès
Amis, voyez tan la ran que la gloire
Bénit toujours ta ta ta les François ! ”

“ And they applauded ? ” asked Madame de Malguet through her laughter.

“ To the echo ! — the couplet had never been known to have been received with half such enthusiasm according to Potier ! ”

“ Monsieur Potier is an ingenious gentleman who lives by making us laugh, *mon brave*, ” observed the dragoon, “ as you have just now made me do ; but he did not tell you that half the people in the house most likely, as it was a favourite piece, knew the words of the couplet by heart, and *thought* they heard them : but Mademoiselle does not smile even ! what thinks she of my friend’s anecdote ? ”

Father Velasquez had more than smiled at Merrick’s story, but Annechet’s lips moved not ; she continued steadily employed upon some delicate piece of work that lay before her. When addressed, she looked up more gravely than was her wont, and answered —

“ I do not like to see the semblance of a noble enthusiasm ridiculed, and Captain Merrick laughs some-

times a little too much for me. As for the man who insulted the patriotic feeling of his countrymen, he was simply a low-souled buffoon."

And she resumed her needle with an air of quiet composure, and with something of her resigned nun's look, as if she were, after her fashion, indignant.

"The lady yonder is wrong," thought the dragoon with a strange throb at his heart, "and Merrick is, as he has always been, the most truth-speaking noble being on earth." He looked towards the sailor as to attract his attention, but saw him closely engaged in a conversation apart with the lady of La Chalaudre. The *Journal des Débats* lay before them, a passage in which Merrick seemed to be with earnestness explaining. Madame de Malguet with an expression of infinite interest seemingly made him repeat more than once the information she required; then looking at her watch, and asking Finot something of the post hour for Paris, she signed to the notary to go with her, and clutching rather than holding the newspaper, left the room so precipitately that Annechet, occupied with her work, did not perceive she was gone.

The sailor rose and crossed the room towards Monsieur de La Chalaudre, saying as he seated himself —

“ I have found more news in the paper than I had expected, and some that touches me nearly ;—I must go hence, there has been a partial change of ministry in England.”

“ Change of ministry !—change of the moon !” exclaimed the dragoon, whose exultation at his late discovery rushed through his being like wild fire, “ you are as mad as these fluctuating politicians themselves to dream of leaving hearty friends and happy quarters to dance attendance upon some fresh set of your oligarchy, as Napoleon called it truly, thrust into a power they have not discrimination to exercise.”

“ For all that, good friend, go I must: my old frigate,—the one I was first lieutenant in, and whence I was promoted, is named as likely to be commissioned, and ——”

“ Merrick, 'tis the old story : — old frigates, and past promotions ! you will do no good, friend : try to persuade this would-be-deserter from us, Mademoiselle,” continued the dragoon, addressing Annechet, — “ that this haven of rest is worth a hundred idle schemes of employment, which he will pine more of his life out for, and never have.”

Annechet replied placidly but decidedly — “ If Captain Merrick stays here as your guest I shall be

happy, for you like him, Monsieur de La Chalaute: if for his own occasions he goes hence, he goes with my best wishes for his success elsewhere."

Words could not speak plainer. The sailor leaned across the table his friend sat at, wrote in a hurried scrawl, "You have heard,—judge now for yourself," across the nearest paper that lay before him, and with a bow to Annechet left the room. While the dragoon deciphered the disfigured characters before him, and Annechet, fearful of being overbold, blushed downcast over her work, Father Velasquez glided from the chamber unperceived by either of them.

Five — ten minutes elapsed; there was no sound of life in the room. She raised her eyes, and found herself alone with the Marquis. Annechet strove to rise, — her knees bent under her: she sought to resume her composure and continue her work till her aunt returned, but the dazzling web danced before her, her trembling fingers refused to guide the needle, and her hands sank on her knees powerless from agitation.

The dragoon hardly less embarrassed, rose at last, and placed himself before her. He took her hand gently, and said —

"Annechet, tell me, — am I right?"

One glance of those upturned eyes, that swimming

in the light of love, looked for an instant into his soul, and then were lost again beneath their envious lids, — that one glance answered him.

He kissed the hand he held, but very lightly, and left the room.

That was the soldier's wooing.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ice-palace of Catharine of Russia was perhaps, in the long catalogue of human futilities, about as futile a thing as the hand of man ever created. Cold, elusive, uninhabitable, and semi-transparent to the sight of all men, the very burlesque of solidity, it melted to naught without the will of the founder, on the near approach of the natural atmospheric influences, which in their genial warmth, forbade duration to the artificial bulk, that seemed a shelter, yet was none.

The passionless and systematic scheme which piles heart upon heart, building up a system of society in which the affections have no resting place, calling this union, is not unanalogous to such actual junction of ice-blocks. All see through the structure; none have trust in its lastingness; and when from without, a warmer ray touches the mass, it resolves into the type of all that is unstable, — water.

The hateful hypocrisy of pretending to believe the existence of a feeling of mutual attraction in the

hearts that interest thus conjoins, is a necessary and inherent attribute with those who are the builders and framers, the schemers and designers of such unnatural combinations. Wordly motives are ashamed of themselves, and hang the frippery of false sentiment up to hide their ugliness; which, like the rich blonde veil over septuagenarian features, enhances with a disreputable affectation, the foulness that, to the eye of the discerning, it cannot conceal. "Deep calleth unto deep," and lie responds to lie, but none need be deceived save those that choose to be so; the mind must be bent and bowed to make it accept falsehood as truth; or bow and bend itself to do so. It was in vain Madame de Malguet essayed this. She had watched the intercourse of Annechet and the sailor, and tried, as I have said, to deceive herself into a detection of early attachment in one or two of its conventional characteristics; but days went on, and the characteristics showed no sequel in their sort; so that while her wishes invited an illusion, her noble nature, and the very purity of her motives conjoined to repel the influence of a falsehood. She had scarce laid the foundations of her ice-palace, ere the material dissolved under her hand. But whether a sort of vague optimism consoled her in this fresh failure of her projects, or another secret feeling glad-

dened her heart in the sight of her own disappointment, it is certain that she was much less affected than could have been imagined at the mischance. This may latterly have been owing to the entertainment of a new design which visited her brain; for, never wearied with labouring out schemes for Merrick's benefit, she found in this occupation an interest and excitement that made solitude oftentimes enjoyment to her.

Under these circumstances she listened with placid quiescence to the dragoon's apologies, for having spared to speak to her before venturing to address the young lady, and, when appealed to for the expression of her wishes, gave them utterance with her wonted determination and composure. There was only one reflection that interfered to diminish her approval of Annechet's choice, and that was a sort of contempt for the girl herself for choosing as she did.

"A marquis, and a soldier! there was the key," thought she with some bitterness, "that unlocked the frozen casket of a cloistered heart! The little nun has but a tawdry taste! He is a goodly figure though still," she ran on to herself, watching the dragoon as he paced up and down the terrace with Merrick; "the expression a little stern or so, but the

good sisters always love to be a little afraid of what they love, and doubtless it put her in mind of her father confessor — her father confessor? yes; there, perhaps, as I was inclined sometimes to think, lay the secret of the attachment, but he was absent: let them marry in God's name, and there will be heirs at any rate for the broad lands of La Chalaudre, when she that loved the place so well shall be resolved into its clay."

The conference on the terrace had concluded, and the Marquis with the sailor entered the room.

"Merrick leaves us, madame," said the former; "he thinks his presence painful to us, and has told me to express his intention of going hence to you: there is some change in matters in England."

"I know it," replied the lady, "and also that there is no need of our friend's departure."

"Believe me," interposed Merrick, "that personal application is most necessary in these matters, and Lord Danesbury, who is now in the Board of Admiralty, was, as Will Streatham, when a young lieutenant, not unknown to me."

"Again I repeat," said Madame de Malguet, "that there is no need of your departure. Annechet leaves us to-morrow for Paris."

"To-morrow?" inquired the dragoon.

“With, or rather without, your leave, good nephew, yet; I arranged this with Madame Finot yesterday; she takes her daughter and our cousin Lucrèce to Paris, to make such preparations for their weddings as are needful, and to the two brides expectant, we have thought it best to add a third; my kind and gracious well-wishers,” and she named persons of eminence at court, “or let me say, *ours*, for ’twas for your sake as much as mine, Monsieur de la Chaulautre, the *thing* was done, have claimed our Annechet as their charge in Paris, and from their house, if it be your will, she shall be married. I need not say that though cousin Finot be an excellent useful soul in the country, yet that she has derogated, and is not quite the person to hold a mother’s place to your betrothed in the capital. I, for such a purpose at such a time, am worse than useless; but leaving these things to others, when all is ready, we will to Paris together; and now will Captain Merrick leave us at such a time?”

“It is well and thoughtfully cared for in all respects,” answered the Marquis; “Merrick shall no longer be frightened from us by Mademoiselle de Malguet’s fair eyes, nor I kept in a world of perplexity to know how matters are to be managed on this momentous occasion; besides I am too old to

play Lindor and Corydon about the groves of La Chalaudre."

And truth to say, the part of lover professed and lover betrothed, sat awkwardly enough on the dagoon. He looked round him on the elegant evidences of Annechet's taste, as the well-ordered mansion, the growing beauty of the garden, the magnificence of the glade-cut forest, the peasants whom she taught and aided, and he thought with pride and exultation of Madame de la Chalaudre, as the mistress of the fair domain, as the guiding spirit of the place, and the benefactress of the people; but it was the "to be," not the "is," which lived in his imagination, and the walk or the drive with the fair, blushing, low-voiced, silent nun, in company with Madame de Malguet, or Father Velasquez, who cared not for the topics that his Desdemona loved, was, honestly, a bore. He liked to sit quiet and watch the beautiful being at her occupations, follow her graceful movements with his eye, and let the music of her voice make pleasant echoes round him, and doing this, unseen or unobserved, he was happy. The intelligence that his betrothed was going to mix a little in the world, the comforting reflection that during that time he could think of her as a very charming creature whom he was not obliged to walk with, and meet her

again with her conventual style somewhat relieved of its excessive quietude, came upon him welcomingly; this unsentimental, but not less sincere, husband in embryo, felt that he could not show his betrothed that he loved her, in his way, either so as to convince her of the fact, or not seem in the eyes of the bye-standers, to be as callous as eccentric. There was a relief at his heart as he walked to the chamber window, and thought that the fair figure, leaning over her sisters in creation — flowers, in the terraced garden yonder, would soon bloom for the time elsewhere and leave him to the enjoyment of his friend's society, and must I add it — his cigars.

“Stay, Merrick!” said Madame de Malguet, as the soldier turned away, “stay now, I entreat you: we, perhaps, may not hereafter so often meet again: I shall, however, have my own house to receive friends in; — that at Rennes-les-Marais is the jointure house of the family, and thither shall I go when they are married.”

“Not with your nephew's good-will,” answered Merrick, “he, like a soldier as he is, has told his bride she must follow a soldier's fortunes as his wife, or else fulfil a daughter's duties towards you, when every instant he can spare from duty shall be hers.”

“Well,” said Madame de Malguet with a sigh,

“ I should be sorry to leave the place I love, and glad indeed to share it with that gentle creature : he does not understand her, Merrick, I had destined her for a better lot : oh ! why —— ”

“ Hush ! ” exclaimed the sailor hastily, “ it could have never been, never ! she will understand him, and does so almost now ; she will be his pride and happiness, and find her pride in him.”

“ Pride ? ” asked Madame de Malguet, “ pride is a bad thing, my friend, and always a bad thing — in married life, with man it rests a selfishness, and with woman, it smacks of awe and admiration, but not of love.”

“ But if it hold the place of love ? ”

Madame de Malguet, with a slight hasty gesture, cut short the conversation, and arose, leaving the room, as she said, to communicate the determination of the morning to her niece, and prepare for her departure. That evening the Marquis and his friend spent alone ; a few lines only intimated to the former that his betrothed would leave La Chalaute soon after dawn on the morrow, and invited him to bid her farewell before she departed. They were written by Madame de Malguet, and Merrick was not mentioned in them.

Monsieur de La Chalaute accordingly waited

alone in the drawing-room the next morning at an hour very decently, all things considered, in advance of the one named, as a lover should do : Father Velasquez joined him a quarter of an hour later, and the ladies shortly afterwards. They were fully equipped for their journey, as if there, merely for the form of bidding adieu without a thought of lingering as they did so. The Marquis evinced some surprise, perhaps, at finding Madame de Malguet prepared to accompany her niece who entered with her Flemish maid behind her, carrying what appeared to be a heavy, though not a cumbersome, package.

“I go with Annechet to the town,” said the lady of La Chalaudre, “and will see her safely on her way, and then return to help you in counting the days of her absence.”

She looked encouragingly at the young girl, as if she would obviate by a smiling farewell the chances of a tearful one ; but Annechet had neither smile on her lips, nor tear in her eye : her look was in the extreme anxious, and eager, as if the mind were pre-occupied with some idea of importance which she longed to communicate. Father Velasquez signed to her with his eyes, and a slight bending of the head betokened approval and encouragement.

“Monsieur de La Chalaudre,” said his betrothed,

“ on the day that your titles were acknowledged, a sum of money was entrusted to my good aunt by her notary, which as connected with past events of a sad and depressing nature, he did not like in a moment of happiness to bring to your notice: she in her turn has left me the deposit to make over to you, where and how I liked.”

She took the package that her servant carried, if term so ordinary can be applied to some object wrapped in a woman's scarf of silk, and lace, and opening it, displayed the silver-mounted keg, which had belonged to the Sutler-Marchioness.

“ This case contains, I am told, money that your mother owned, and the contents were destined, I hear, by you to some good and pious purpose. The soul of the deceased,” she added, crossing herself, “ should be our first care; and next, the institution of some fund for alms, or other godly end, whereby her name may, in the prayers of the poor, be piously remembered. On all this I have advised with my good father yonder, and according as the sum you may find in the casket, so I pray you, let your disposition of it be, taking counsel from Him who in these things is wise, as in all else.”

There was something affecting to the dragoon in seeing this pure and simple creature ministering as

it were vicariously for his mother, in the disposition of this treasure-heap of spoil and sinful gain. He took Annechet's hand and kissed it.

"Your desire, my betrothed," said he, "shall to the letter be obeyed. I only wish that in addition to the good father, he who fastened up so jealously the case you see before you, my friend Merrick, should also see it opened, and verify the contents with me."

The parting, these words said, was brief and formal; the injunction Annechet gave, and the sort of sentiment that it conveyed, made the occasion solemn rather than sad, and the dragoon was not unmindful of the delicacy which had replaced in his possession a memorial, the sight of which might otherwise have jarred unpleasantly upon his recollections. Thus went fair Annechet, blessed and blessing, from the valley of La Chalaudre, nor should she look upon its pleasant woods and glassy mere again, till she were a wedded wife, and they might call her mistress.

"You went, and took the Spring with you"

sings in his lament some Irish bard, as if with the absence of the loved being, the verdure of the trees

had faded, the perfume of the flowers had failed, and the bright glow of nascent life passed off from the face of smiling nature. This is the poetic illustration of one of the commonest of feelings, — that which invests ordinary objects with interest, while the creature we care for, is connected with them ; and thence, carried out in more imaginative minds to the wide field of Nature herself, makes us see the horizon pale with the diminution of our personal hopes or pleasures.

If the dragoon, for reasons already mentioned, felt relieved from a certain degree of irksomeness by this separation from Annechet, it was, on the other hand, of use, by hinting to him, at this early period of his relations with her, the value of her presence, a thing which, in married life, custom makes men fail to appreciate in their companion until sometimes too late. He learned his lesson the better for being deprived of the anticipated enjoyment of Merrick's pleasant talk and cheerful temper. The breakfast hour came, but with it came not the sailor. The day wore on, and Father Velasquez departed to watch the progress of work at the little chapel. Merrick was absent still, and no tidings of him being procurable, the Marquis rode forth to while away the progress of that leaden-footed enemy to idle men, spare .

time, — by sauntering through the forest and over the rich acres of his wide domain.

Now, it had so chanced that Merrick, having quit-
ted the château, for obvious reasons, at a very early
hour, met, as he strolled up the valley, the keeper,
Pierrefeu, out with his helpers, breaking some young
dogs, and exercising the older tenants of his kennel,
preparatory to the shooting season. As among the
junior canines were certain of the progeny of his own
setters, the sailor became doubly interested in the
business of the morning; and a circuit of considerable
extent, to judge of the promise which the year gave
of sport, took him far, and perhaps not unintention-
ally so, from the valley of La Chalaudre. A late
breakfast at a farmhouse, delayed his return, which
was effected so deliberately that, when Father Velas-
quez reached the chapel, he found the sailor busied
in superintending the adjustment of the tackle where-
by the carved stone pinnacles, each comprising a mass
of some weight, were to be raised to the chapel roof
— a feat in mechanics which the awkward country
masons were about to attempt, in a manner that
scandalised the professional ingenuity of Merrick.
The good father, with many delicate and flattering
allusions to the skill and kindness of the sailor, and
much amusing talk, and instructive too, as to the

application of human intellect in overcoming the inert resistance of matter, so contrived to stimulate and amuse the kind-hearted extemporaneous architect, that by the time he had got to the building of the Escorial (having prudently begun a good way back with Cheops and the Pyramids), he was quite surprised to find the pinnacles each in its destined site—a discovery which he made at the same time with the occurrence of that daily astronomical phenomenon, termed sunset! It was then that he remembered the Marquis desired Captain Merrick's company—a fact that had previously, during the interesting business of the afternoon, escaped his recollection. How often does it not happen that an ingenious manœuvrer is deceived by the ready acquiescence of his supposed victim, into a strange over-estimate of his own powers of management! The sailor and the priest wended their way back to the château, the one dwelling complacently on the invaluable assistance which, *ad majorem Dei gloriam*, he had wrung from his companion's practical mechanics; the other glad at heart at having chanced upon an accident which kept him away on that day from the château and Madame de Malguet.

Reaching La Chalaudre, they found the Marquis had returned; but Madame de Malguet, of whose

absence Merrick then first heard, was still abroad. The friends met in the dining-room, where, with that adoption of English habits which had always been usual in the château, the table was prepared at an hour much later than ordinary, even in Paris, in that day. The meal was not a cheerful one, although Father Velasquez, with his usual plasticity, endeavoured to catch the temper of the moment and adopt the tone of conversation that might suit it. Merrick was tired, the dragoon melancholy, and the priest — he felt it — *de trop*. That discreet person therefore vanished at a very early hour after the cloth was drawn; when the Marquis, taking his cigar, invited his friend to sit out awhile on the terrace and await the return of the lady.

It was a lovely quiet starlight night, bright overhead, but pitch dark in the valley — one in which your moralist might have found trite emblems — the tangled obscurity of earthly life, and the eternal day spring from on high. The air was loaded with vegetal perfume, and, borne upon it, the song of the loud-voiced nightingale reached the silent listeners with double sweetness.

“I have had a monotonous morning of it,” at last observed the dragoon; “while you, my good friend, were playing gamekeeper and mason;” — for

Merrick and the priest had both recited the occurrences of the day. "What a blessed mental constitution must you have, that takes you cheerily off to find interest in occupations that others would term trivial, at times when a sort of sadness were otherwise involuntary; and always with a sort of kindness in what you do!"

The sailor laughed, as though good humouredly he did so at himself, and answered something as to the strain which must be put on the interpretation of good deeds, when the mastering an obstinate puppy, or aiding a puzzled mechanic, was to be classed among them.

"Class me what classes you please," replied the soldier; "this I know, that you were occupying your mind and helping folk in their need, while I was either idling, or taken up in the useless excitement of melancholy reflections. — I rode," he continued, "all the afternoon about the neighbourhood my mother's youth was passed in. I visited the farm her father rented, and found some persons of his name (one keeps the hedge alehouse you made old Josse so glorious at—do you remember?); but none relatives, so far as I could make out.—They were stupid peasants, with hardly sense in their brains to retain a tradition even, as to things or individuals connected

with aught before the Revolution, which seemed with them an epoch that divided the past world from the present."

"And why this melancholy ride to-day, colonel? and wherefore this useless perquisition?"

"'Twas connected with what I have been waiting the day long to see you about. — I wanted chiefly to find the house my mother was born and passed her youth in, to build an almshouse there; but its very site was uncertain among the louts I questioned. — Josse or Pierrefeu may know more of it."

"The latter, I have reason to believe," answered the sailor, "will be able to speak exactly to the point; but what put this thought — an excellent one by the way, to carry which out is not to spend a useless afternoon — what made you think of this to-day?"

"You recollect the *vivandière's* keg you corded up so carefully? — my mother's, with the gold in it, which you wished me so to make my own? — Well, it was given me this morning with injunctions to turn the contents to good account. — I would not open it, save in your presence, and as I had intended, the lady's also; but it is getting late and she comes not."

And as he spoke he stamped, as of old in his quarters or the *cabaret* (for marquises cannot alter

manners), for an attendant. Meudon, who was waiting in the hall his master's intentions touching bedtime, made his appearance with a smile on his lip at the vulgarism, which darkness permitted him to indulge in. The Marquis asked him what was known of the lady's plans.

"The young Flemish person," replied the coxcomb, "who attends Mademoiselle de Malguet, gave me to understand that the probability of Madame la Marquise returning this evening admits of a doubt. My information is limited, as I do not speak to the other servants."

"Except, understand me, Monsieur Meudon, when I am to be served," rejoined the dragoon; "but enough — 'tis not worth waiting longer: — put the package," he added to his valet, "that was taken to my apartments this morning, on the table in the sitting-room, and get us lights there."

The chamber, where some twenty minutes afterwards the friends were seated, was of moderate dimensions, though rather large for the purpose to which it was applied, occupying a place between the ante-room of the suite and the bedchamber. It was tapestried, the only room at La Chalaudre which was so, and the hangings were from the loom that has immortalised the brothers Gobelin with the

fame of an art which they knew not: but, despite the extreme beauty of the woven picture, the subject made it repulsive; some former lord of La Chalaudre having selected the descent of Æneas into the infernal regions for the decoration of his walls. The treatment of it had been clever; for the room having been apparently measured by the designer of the pattern, the fold which fell before the entrance door, bore semblance of a rocky passage, where howled in worsted the three-headed dog, leading into the *enceinte* of woe; while the single window looked like a fissure, through which the glimpse of the fair park and forest of La Chalaudre might stand for a far view of those Elysian fields to which the pictured web seemed to be leading, as in the circuit of the walls it reached the entrance to the inner chamber. It was a strange conceit, the speaking act perhaps of a misanthropic mind that loved to bury itself amid the vulgar representation of a mystery, which typified—perhaps, with weakly mockery—the hell that raged within it. Here amid the flames of Acheron and Cocytus, the terrors of whose woollen conflagration had paled, while their banks and rocks and monsters all had darkened, did the dragoon like sitting when he was alone, as if he took pride in appropriating hereditarily this peculiar family apartment.

To tell the truth, the servants, and even Josse, were somewhat chary of entering the room, entertaining an idea that it was “na canny,” as they say across the Tweed; and here the dragoon could smoke and muse, and the philosopher Meudon indulge his Parisian exclusiveness, in peace. But it was a dreary melancholy room, in which two wax tapers served merely to show how dark it was.

“Come, Merrick,” exclaimed his friend, as they seated themselves; “break the seals, and cut those lashings of yours; or stay, are you in the anteroom, Meudon?”

“I am in your Lordship’s room,” replied the philosopher, emerging from the corner in which the woven Erebus shrouded his figure in its shades.—“I had not left it, waiting for orders.”

“And not unanxious to ascertain the contents of the package here, I fancy?”

Meudon muttered something about the secret of their treasure, and its strange depository having excited the curiosity of Mademoiselle de Malguet’s Flemish young person; which the dragoon interrupted by a somewhat peremptory order, directing him to take his compliments to Father Velasquez, with a request that he would favour Captain Merrick and himself with his company; “and on your return,

Monsieur Meudon, you will recollect to remain in waiting in the antechamber."

The philosophic valet bowed and disappeared.

"Strange, Merrick, is it not, that the idea of the mystery attaching to this ill-got gold, should have so grafted itself on the minds of these inquisitive fools?"

"She that amassed it," replied the sailor as he cut the cords and pulled the wrappers from the keg, "was one they dreaded, and wondered at, if not admired: add to this the story of her life, and you can easily account for a passion for the marvellous in common minds in all that was connected with her. But there it is at last," he continued, pressing the spring and opening the casket; "I may now say, Take your inheritance."

"Or rather that of the poor," rejoined the Marquis, emptying the contents of the keg upon the table.

The rouleaux, packed in cartridge paper, were so numerous as to give, at a cursory glance, the idea of a considerable sum.

"There must be more than eight hundred Napoleons," observed the dragoon, breaking one of them; "don't mind the *bidon*, Merrick; it is empty."

“Nay, I do but want to see the trick of the spring,” and, as the sailor spoke, he lifted the little cask, and held it to the light. There was something in it still; he shook it, but the substance moved not: putting in his hand, he withdrew from the bottom of the keg an old pocket-book, the clasp of which had rusted, and thus produced a slight adhesion to the wood. The dragoon looked up an instant at Merrick’s exclamation on this discovery, and resumed his reckoning of the gold, as if he had seen what liked him not.

“I know that,” he said quietly; “’t was Pierre Lambert’s. Burn it, Merrick, and let all be forgotten.”

With that he went on counting out the gold.

“There is a form of looking at such things, which I, who am in a manner,” observed the sailor, “a sort of trustee to your mother, ought, I believe, to go through; — do you object?”

The dragoon shrugged his shoulders and pursued his occupation, reckoning the coins slowly and carefully, again and again, as if he took a pleasure in them, and then parcelling them out in different piles of various amounts; he added and diminished, or altered and renewed his disposition of their various totals, as if he were deliberating on the objects to

which the several funds should be applied. Merrick, meanwhile, shook out the contents of the pocket-book on the table. With the exception of a parchment envelope, on which was an endorsement purporting that it contained a baptismal extract, nearly the whole of the mass of papers consisted of scraps and detached fragments, with no letters among them: copies of regimental orders — a large collection of soldier's songs, patriotic and other, — several of Napoleon's printed proclamations, much thumbed and worn, — memoranda of lodgings and wine-houses, — a roll-call or two, and so forth, were in succession turned over, and thrown aside. And these were the love-tokens she had preserved so many years beneath her gold, the *vivandière*.

"Well, Merrick," said the soldier, looking up, " 'tis all trash?"

"All," was the reply, "this document included." And, as the sailor spoke, he broke open the seal of the parchment envelope. It contained two documents also on parchment: the one was the baptismal extract, certifying to the birth and Christian being of one Casimir Melhusac; the other was a much longer writing, engrossed in notarial language, and purporting to be an Act of Grace, issued by royal authority in favour, it appeared, of this same person.

It set forth that, at the instance of several high and noble personages hereinafter mentioned, a *lettre de cachet*, or warrant for summary imprisonment in the Bastille, “*durante beneplacito*,” having been prepared in the case of Casimir Melhusac, late an equerry in the stable royal, His Majesty Louis, Sixteenth of that name, had of his infinite clemency been induced to pardon his offence against good morals, by shamefully wronging the honour of a noble house, in consideration of his youth, and on the fulfilment of certain conditions for the execution of which the Sieur Casimir Melhusac (senior), valet in the household royal, and Jean Melhusac, his brother, stood as sureties.

1. That the said Casimir Melhusac, the son, should utterly abjure and cease to use the name his father gave him ; and, forgetting for ever his kindred and past life, enlist as a common soldier in the regiment Royal Allemand, under the name of Pierre Lambert, or such other as might be assigned him.

2. That he, before and in the presence of the aforesaid personages, on behalf of the most noble the Marquis de la Chalautre, and of a most reverend prelate, Gobet, bishop of Paris, should swear by — (the obligation is too awful for insertion) — that he would never name the name of Marie, commonly

called Marquise de la Chalaudre, nor seek in any way to communicate with her, personally or by message, on penalty in this world of perpetual imprisonment in the Bastille, and of causing the deportation of the said Marie, and of the child, if it should live, whereof he, Casimir Melhusac, otherwise called Pierre Lambert, was the father, to any colony beyond the seas, which it should please His Majesty to appoint: and all this in addition to the inevitable future that awaited the infringement of his oath.

To this document were appended the signatures of the prelate and two other persons, the Baron de Felingue, and the Count Amadée de Ravillac, certifying that the oath had been taken, together with the names of the sureties subscribed to the execution of the conditions. The writing was the counterpart copy of an original which bore perhaps more signatures, vacant places having been left in this for the names of other friends, and relatives of the family of la Chalaudre, who had not apparently troubled themselves to attach their names to a duplicate.

“Merrick—why, Merrick!—’t is the third time I’ve tried to—Good God! man, are you ill?” and the dragoon arose in a sort of alarm at the fixed and stony gaze with which the sailor read and re-read the parchment, without hearing or heeding the words

addressed to him; shaken by the shoulder by the hand of one too anxious not to be rough, he rose as one awakening.

“ I began to think that I had dreamt it,” he said ; then signing to his vacant chair and the parchment, walked to the open window. The dragoon looked after him a moment—then sat down and read as had done his friend. There was stillness in the room for some minutes. The dragoon re-read the document, and thought awhile ; — at length his deep voice was heard in slow and deliberate utterance.

“ This matter belongs to a world that is gone by ; and, *palsambleu !* with this before me, I ’ll blame the peasants no more for making the period of what they know rest on the Revolution. Madame de Malguet is Pierre Lambert’s daughter : so be it ; she is none the worse woman for that, whatever her mother may have been : and to you and me what is it ? Say she has fancies about birth and blood, and flights about high family—say that we smile at the vanity of such follies, not in her only, but as instanced unconsciously by herself in mankind at large ; — and what then ? She is a kindly, noble-hearted being ; and, could the fiat of your Ravillacs and Felingues prove her blood were ditch water, they could not disprove that ! Come, Merrick, never bend your brow in that sad

fashion! she shall never know it, man; and, like the negro cuckold in your English play you were speaking of the other day, not knowing it, be happy in her ignorance. Give me your knife — this parchment once in shreds, the secret sleeps with poor Pierre Lambert's bones, or how call you him? Melhusac's, on the field of Grodno."

A sigh, gentle but distinct, seemed to breathe a requiem over the buried mystery. They both started.

"We have had too many in council. Meudon!" exclaimed the soldier. There was no answer; but as he snatched a candle to examine the chamber, Father Velasquez stepped from the obscurity which had enveloped him, and exhibited his meek and quiet features beneath the feeble light.

"How came you here, sir?" asked the Marquis surveying him sternly.

"By your desire," was the calm reply.

"And why surprise us with your presence then?"

"The servant had orders not to leave the ante-room—the door was open—the tapestry only screened the entrance—I entered; and if you were so engrossed by the subject of your conversation as not to hear my entry, is the fault mine?"

"Your pardon, sir," answered the Marquis; "I

had forgotten that you were expected: but let me ask, have you heard any word, or witnessed the production of any writing that Captain Merrick and myself would have wished to have kept to ourselves only? If so, remember that your presence was not wanted, and that you listened therefore in a virtual breach of confidence. Your knife, Merrick!" and snatching the penknife from the sailor's hand, he had already seized the parchment to destroy it, when the priest touched his arm, and said, with a meek and meaning smile —

"The *soutane*, sir, has its honour as well as has the sabre; but it is the honour of maintaining the truth, however obnoxiously, not of hiding it to foster worldly vain-glory. You must not destroy that document."

"I must not?"

"Nay, you may do what you please; but I, dealing in perfect honesty and truth, must let my daughter in the spirit, my dear child Annechet, know who she is whom the girl vainly calls her aunt; and what you have done that seek to term yourself her husband. My vow will not let me hold my peace."

"The secret has died in the breast of time," said Merrick, solemnly; "and why revive it? The oaths

that Melhusac swore were, in their practical effect, clinched by the revolutionary movements that did not let him dare to speak about himself, as one that had served a king or loved a noble. Do you not wrench the dead man's lips asunder, breaking the oath he took, yourself, in making this wretched parchment public? nay — fly in the face of the very destinies of God, revealed in the vicissitudes of nations, that combined to keep the mystery unrevealed?"

Neither of those that spoke with him could see into the Jesuit's heart. — The absence of an influence over Annechet in Madame de Malguet, which might work against his projects for the Church, and the expulsion from La Chalaute of one who had, he thought, seen through him — these were his only objects: as for the victim that he sought to sacrifice, his feelings personally were strongly in her favour. He thought her a clever woman and a good.

"You argue cunningly, Captain Merrick," rejoined he; "but I have said what I must do, and what I will do. Destroy the document, and I have still the knowledge of the truth, do what you will; and you, as you are men of honour, must bear witness that my words are true."

The dragoon dashed the parchment on the table.

The threat held out touching his bride had sobered the vehemence of an imprudent resentment; but he swore an oath, — and he fulfilled it, — that Annechet once his wife, La Chalautre should know the influence of no Father Velasquez, neither in the body nor the spirit.

At that moment the sound of wheels was heard at a distance; the night was still, the windows open, and the dull rumbling was perceptible long ere the coming vehicle had neared the château. The priest listened an instant, and then said —

“It is her carriage. Gentlemen, good night. Whether the lady learns the truth of what she is, from you to-night, or me to-morrow, matters little. I fain would save you the pain of the avowal; but, pray you, take the course your judgment deems the best.”

And, bowing in pious humility, the meek and conscientious man betook him to his chamber.

The friends sat silent; as the coming wheels gave every instant louder evidence that she whom they awaited dreadingly, was nearer and still nearer to them. At last, as the sound ceased suddenly before the château, Merrick rose, and took a sudden turn or two in the chamber; then, as one whose mind has been with difficulty driven to decision, he said —

“Not a word, my friend, from you: give me that

cursed deed, or document, and let me deal with her, poor soul! though it gives me anguish to do so; better thus a myriad times than ——”

“And I who am the head of what was her house,” asked the dragoon, “shall I not do my duty? Spare yourself, Merrick, and let me speak.”

The generous contest might have lasted longer, had not the entrance of an unexpected visitor cut short discussion. It was the lady herself—she had left the carriage and gone straight to where she heard the friends were sitting, — hastening up staircase and down corridor, with a step light and elastic as the sense of that joy which it betokens: thus, while they spoke, she rushed, rather than walked, into the room between them, her eyes dilated with happiness, her features radiant with success.

“See here!” she cried, exhibiting a bundle of letters bearing a foreign postmark. “See the wish of my heart fulfilled! I knew this post would bring the answer — I waited till the mail came in — I sat in weary anxious expectation hours long for it, and here, — pardon me, Merrick, that my patience broke down and your letter seals broke with it, — here is my reward!”

And as she spoke she thrust the opened letters into the sailor’s hands who, in the first he glanced at,

saw the well-known form which named him to the command of his old and well-loved ship, the *Calpestris*, then esteemed the finest frigate in the British navy.

Turning from Merrick, whom she left to devour his emotion and read his letters in peace, Madame de Malguet held forth in all the volubility of excitement to the dragoon, upon the strange occurrences that had made her the instrument of bringing fortune to their friend; — the English officer she had befriended in Leghorn — the name first mispronounced, then lost, and then at last crossing her eye in the items of a newspaper — her having thereon reminded the former object of her friendly aid, titled now and powerful, of his past pledge to her, not without due care to procure from her influential friends in Paris corroborative and recommendatory letters — and lastly, the gracious and generous reply of the Admiralty lord, who, it seemed, was not less happy to serve an old and meritorious acquaintance (one or two “popularity nominations” being thought at the time expedient) than to redeem his ancient pledge and pay his debt of gratitude. But, as she spoke, no sympathising gleam of pleasure shone on the soldier’s countenance, and he looked even sadder than before as, without a word, he pointed toward Merrick.

The figure of the sailor was darkly seen, the face averted, leaning against the tapestried wall.

“What! is he so overcome?” inquired Madame de Malguet, half incredulously, though the sight was there before her eyes; “that is most unlike him!—and you, Monsieur de la Chalaudre, that give smile for smile and sigh for sigh with your friend yonder, why do you, too, stare on me with that fixed and melancholy look, as if I had brought the tidings of calamity instead of joy?”

She stood between the sailor and his friend, strangely affected by the gloomy countenance and attitude of each, which showed, it seemed, the more ominously eloquent of something evil, in that room hung with the pictured types of misery and torment.

“Will you not speak?” cried she, at last; “have I come here to get no greetings for my toil, nor a word even? Are you men,” she said, with an abrupt harshness, something like what of old was one of her characteristics—“are you men, and dare not say what has happened, if aught have?”

The sailor turned as she spoke, and approached her.

“Men’s eyes should be of horn,” he said, “to keep the woman’s vent of tears from out them. Listen, lady,

and learn from me the misery that forbids either of us, your friends here, from rejoicing."

There was something in his manner that insensibly subdued and depressed the buoyancy of her excitement, which, thwarted, seemed to tend to irritation. She seated herself; and with a vague look of anxiety, tried to peruse the features of her companions. Merrick put the folded parchment that contained the Act of Grace her father had escaped by, before her.

"Read this hereafter — hear me now. I do but speak to save you from the bitterness of learning the bitter truth from hostile lips, instead of from your friends: — but before you do read this, know briefly that it contains matter which to your proud and generous spirit, — stop me not," he cried to the dragoon who would have silenced him, — "which, to your spirit renders a residence here intolerable — *must* make it so, I say; for the fortune hereby decreed to you is the saddest that could fall to the lot of woman, being homelessness, to the loss of the very name she thinks she has a right to bear!"

Madame de Malguet shuddered and grew paler than her wont. Merrick continued: —

"You will go forth having no place to rest in, exiled, as I anticipate, by your own will from these regions that have so long been your pride and your

delight: you will feel, I tell you, that you have no place nor share in them, though destined by so strange a chance to seem for years the owner of the lands, and to be the benefactress of the people."

Merrick had spoken with energy, even to sternness. The news he gave was so seemingly incredible, that he felt the necessity of an impression being made that night which should save his friend from the threatened revelations of the priest on the morrow. He determined she should suffer once only.

"You look upon me strangely; but ask of him that stands by, witness to what I say, whether I speak not true. Read this sad document; and then, when you feel there is on earth no protector whose care you would admit, nor relation to love, nor home to abide in, think of the devotion of——"

Merrick spoke, and the pale cheek of Madame de Malguet grew livid as she listened; but when he reached this point, her woman's instinct read the generous thought that was about to prompt the coming words.

"No more, Merrick," she said; "if you are happy, I shall feel so, let this parchment tell me what it will: 't is but one delusion more dissipated, as I gather from your words; and what is that which

I learn through it?" she added more rapidly, "that man's devotion is woman's best and only lasting blessing!"

The lady rose, and passed abruptly from the room, the parchment in her hand, without another word. Merrick and the dragoon, with anxious bodings as to the morrow, separated, and in like silence.

CHAPTER X.

IT was close upon mid-day, and no sound nor sign of movement was perceptible in the apartments of Madame de Malguet, whence usually the house was roused in summer by the early habits of their occupant. The Calabrese was asked for; but as she slept within the suite allotted to her mistress's use, her absence was not wondered at. The passage door which opened from the hall was locked, and to the repeated summonses from without no answer was returned.

At the usual breakfast hour of the house, eleven, Merrick and the Marquis met, the latter apprised already of the unwonted stillness and mystery observable in the lady's chambers. The priest was not there to consult, having left La Chalaudre at an early hour, saying his return was uncertain,—a thing so common with him as to excite no surprise among the household. On the minds of the two friends, however, the impression flashed simultaneously that his way would take him Paris-ward, and that with little loss of time.

“ You must be quick, Colonel,” as Merrick always termed his friend ; “ we know not how the events of last night may be distorted, nor with what malice the destruction of a deed (actual, or attempted only, will not be mentioned) may be perverted to your injury, and not alone with fair Annechet.”

“ Right, Merrick, as you always are,” replied the dragoon ; “ but I must see the lady before I go ; and, as you have heard, her doors are closed.”

“ She is stunned with her calamities, poor soul ! but let us try to persuade her to an effort. I, too, would see her ; for my way as far as Paris must be yours.”

“ And you, too, leave her Merrick ?”

“ Were it not necessary to join my ship at Plymouth, I still would do so. I know her ; and that which is termed consolation and the presence of sympathy offend her. Send Meudon once again to find if she will see us.”

And that philosophic person proceeded accordingly and with a decent gravity upon his errand, conscious, as he expressed it, that there had been a *cataclasme domestique*, the exact nature of which he promised himself the pleasure of communicating by letter that day to the young Fleming — after, that is, he should have discovered it himself. It was,

however, destined that from his own personal exertions nought was to be elicited : he tried the passage entrance from the grand hall, but ineffectually ; went out upon the terrace, shook and knocked at window after window, and so on round the château : it was in vain ; the fastenings were immovable, the shutters of the windows being mostly closed within, and to every knock and call silence gave answer. The Parisian was baffled, but only for a time ; for soon his recollection, rich in the melo-dramatic horrors of the Porte St. Martin (as the theatre then was), and teeming with dire accounts gleaned from the murder column of the daily papers, of those despairing sempstresses who, in the French metropolis, take leave of life amid the noxious fumes of charcoal — suggested to him whether, under the circumstances of the cataclasm aforesaid, these obstinate closed doors did not point to a very dreadful catastrophe. The aristocracy of France had not yet taken to murder ; and a suicide in high life would, at that time, have made the fortune of any paid newspaper correspondent. Now, Meudon, who was literary, did something in that line for a Parisian third-rate journal ; and as he wished to save the day's post, he determined, as Picotot would have said, to precipitate the *dénouement*.

He returned to his master, and in five minutes the dragoon stood before the passage entrance. Merrick had himself gone to fetch a crowbar from the masons working at the buildings close to the house, when Pierrefeu crossed him. The gamekeeper had been apparently watching near the terrace stairs.

“Your will, sir?” asked he of the sailor, seeing him hurried and anxious; “a crowbar is it? — and to open Madame’s rooms?” He looked up at the sun with the sort of animal sagacity of those who live in the open air, and which tells the flight of time without an artificial aid, and muttered to himself — “They have had time enough.”

Then showing Merrick a bunch of keys, he preceded him to the hall of entrance, where the dragoon had already succeeded in reducing the hints and surmises of Meudon to something within the limits of the truth. The appearance of Merrick and his companion occasioned a diversion of the Marquis’s notice, during which the baffled news monger escaped unseen. Questioned as to his possession of the keys, the gamekeeper replied that while making, about three o’clock that morning, his round through the wood and chase to look for certain deer-stealers, he came upon three persons near the ruins of the old château, a wo-

man and two men: that having pursued and stopped them with the aid of two underkeepers who were with him (the rather that they appeared to be carrying off several bulky packages), he found them to be Madame de Malguet, Brigitta, and the steward: that then it was explained to him that Madame was leaving La Chalaudre to return no more, that her route was to be kept secret, and that he, Pierrefeu, was entrusted with the keys, which he was to keep until the doors were likely to be forced, a contingency which Meudon's interference had precipitated: that on receiving these injunctions, he, Pierrefeu, returned to the château, while of the two men with him, one was sent to a neighbouring farmhouse for a horse and cart; the other kept to aid in carrying Madame's effects, which seemed to be clothes, Brigitta's and her own.

The door was opened, the light allowed to stream into the empty chambers, and search was diligently made for some time for the departed one, while at the same time horses were saddled and men sent forth to beat the country round for miles, in search of her. Whether these scouts performed their duty faithfully is to be doubted, seeing that they knew through the keeper that she whom they loved and had so long obeyed, *would* not be found; but

all returned without tidings of her, save one who fell in with the old man, Josse, who was discovered driving a common farm-cart back to the place whence it had been borrowed: all that the man could depose to was, that the animals that drew the vehicle seemed to have made a far journey; from the steward nothing could be got in the shape of intelligence. Indeed, the old man's tidings, had they been told, would, as he said himself, have now availed nothing; he did not come in till after night-fall, and before that Merrick and the Dragoon had themselves ridden forth; and long they searched and late, without effect.

But ere they departed, the contents of the following lines, written on an open sheet of letter paper, and left under the silver standish on the table in her sitting-room, might have shown how useless was pursuit, when one so determined bent herself to bid it defiance:—

“ I go from the place my presence has so long insulted, to resume my station—the one I rightly fell to, and should have never left. See, Merrick, and you, sir, that hold your right at last, how base blood clings to sordid things. — As it has been, I have led a purposeless existence, seeking things that could not

be mine—imagining to myself an innate nobility of mind that I could never know; and to *make* it, patching up idle theories about the abstract nobilities of the sexes. — O vanity, vanity of life!—did I not know you, Merrick, I should think that there was nothing on earth, true. — But I will study truth, and go to do so in obscurity. Write to me, Annechet, *once* after your marriage; and you, Merrick, *once*, one letter only, from on board your floating home. — I will wait for these, but where it is needless for you to inquire; — the place of my present retreat, revealed by any accident, or any effort on your part, would only make me fly further; leave me in peace. Direct to Josse, I mean, the letters, with the initials of the writers on the envelope, and they will reach me. — Blame him not for his fidelity to me. — Farewell. God bless you, Merrick!

“ U. de M.”

One of the bookcases had upon it a scrap of paper with the words —

“ These books, pray, send to the care of Mariano, Brothers, at Leghorn, addressed for U. M.: they are my own.”

These hasty words, this brief request, were all of her the utmost diligence could discover. The ashes

of many papers in the fireplace of what had been her bedroom, showed that she had employed part of the night in destroying such written records as she could not remove, or cared not to leave extant. Among the mass of crumbling tinder, Merrick could detect the charred and blackened leaves of a large MS., not quite so much consumed but that in the centre of the pages words might be here and there found legible. O holocaust of worldly vanity!—it was her history of La Chalautre.

The only documents they found were the books and papers relative to the revenue and management of the estates of La Chalautre and its dependencies. Those, kept to the day, were in admirable order. The drawers and presses of the wardrobe were filled partly with her feminine attire; here was the only vestige of an absence of neatness in the state of the apartments, the empty presses having been left confusedly open, while on the hearth in the dressing-room were remains apparently of much apparel, doubtless such as could not be removed.

And there was another scene in the drama of life played out, and the stage left vacant for a fresh performer, if ever again those chambers fell to the lot of any occupant; but to both Merrick and the Marquis, the apartment seemed like a place sacred to her that

had gone and would know it no more. Its dreariness seemed like an infection that pervaded the whole of the habitable house, and on the morrow evening they gladly quitted La Chalaudre for the metropolis. There Merrick made no stay, anxious as he was to enter on his duties; and the friends parted, anticipating the period when they should renew their intercourse. But this was not to be; for amid the vicissitudes of active life, they never met again.

Meanwhile the fugitive had reached a place of rest. It was a large and populous village, about fifty miles to the east of La Chalaudre, far from any high road, but still so much in communion with the external world as to have its fluctuations among the residents. The old steward had most providently selected this as the place of the lady's temporary sojourn; and the change of costume which a simple artifice, on leaving the château, had prevented the friends from anticipating, enabled her at once to baffle search and avoid notice. The arrival of a lady, of small means apparently and in weakly health, with only one female attendant, was, in the place of which I speak, no circumstance to attract attention. The lady lodged in a sort of pleasant cottage-house, in the quiet outskirts of the village, two small rooms for herself and an attic for Brigitta her only accommo-

dation, and she found it ample. There were meadows on the banks of a small stream, and well-grown trees among them, near which her abode was situated, and she passed her days there chiefly, speaking to no one; and, indeed, little seen and little known, for the people with whom she lodged were quiet and incurious. Josse wrote to her once or twice as things occurred which merited mention: the marriage of Monsieur de la Chalaudre, for instance, which, on his arrival in Paris, was, for reasons unknown to the steward, hastened somewhat: the return of Father Velasquez to Belgium: and minor matters which the old man thought would interest. The letter from fair Annechet the old man brought himself. It was the model of what might have been expected from a married nun, sweet, affectionate, beatific, with--not to speak it profanely -- Heaven half-deposed in favour of her husband. The lady answered not; and Josse seeing from this her determination fixed, turned him homewards sighing.

The Calabrese, who watched her mistress with an anxious fidelity that seemed to combine animal instinct with human affection, and which strengthened with adversity, observed, about this time, the growth of a sort of listlessness that seemed to affect the lady, with a marked alteration in her habits. She had en-

deavoured at first to read and occupy herself ; but as if struck with the objectless nature of her employment, abandoned it and sank into fits of inactive melancholy stupor. Brigitta longed for the moment of their journey ; but the letter that was expected came not, and her mistress would not speak of moving.

It was nearly three weeks since this alteration had been perceptible, when late one evening the old steward rode up to the humble tenement the lady dwelt in. He bore, as may be supposed, the letter. It was as follows :—

“ H. M. S. Zembla, at sea.

“ I have delayed long, but not neglectfully ; the *why* is briefly this :— A near connection of Lord Danesbury, of my profession, had to be provided for ; the fact was hinted to me, with a sort of written pledge of permanent favour in exchange for present sacrifice. Now, to command the *Calpestris* for three years would have been, for other than a sailor of fortune, a noble lot ; but for me to command her in peace, under the Admiralty frown, and then get shelved for life, suited so little with my views, that I compromised. The Board of Admiralty found a new light thrown on my professionally scientific merits,

by the necessities of Lord Danesbury's relative ; and, with my eager concurrence, I was put in command of the second vessel destined for an arctic expedition of discovery. As the ship was almost ready, I have had little else to do, except prepare myself and embark. The service is one that suits me ; and, please God, I have now bid farewell for life to the rust of inactivity. I have death or distinction before me ; and, in any case, a name.

“ This is the cause that has hindered the one letter from my floating home being sent you long ere now. I love to hope that it will be the more welcome, bearing the assurance that to *you* I owe all I could have wished to live for—honour and employment. Another destiny in life you would have had me take. I tried to accept it ; but, had it even depended on myself, I feel that it—in a word, I am happier in the memory of your friendship than in any other way I could have been, and in its recollection I shall pass my days—if usefully and honourably, knowing you as the cause.

“ You cannot think how cheerfully and happily I feel each onward plunge of the good ship bear me towards the seeming dreary regions which, to me, are bright with hope and rich in knowledge and honour. Not to have lived in vain, with few social and no domestic ties, yet to have achieved something

in one's character as man, constitutes the pride and solace of my existence. I go on my way rejoicing, with a feeling such as I have experienced on going into action. What struggle can be more exciting than that in which one wrestles, not with man for hours, but with the elements for years? — and what cause of strife more noble and exalting than, instead of the questionable quarrel based on a national or merely ministerial policy, the effort to add to the sum of man's knowledge and fathom the wonders of God's works?

“ In the letter you left for us at La Chalaudre, you spoke of having passed a purposeless existence. I have often thought of the expression since, and tried to weigh its justice as applied to your own self.

“ It seems to me that if, to use your own idea, classes of mankind are doomed to different employments for which their inherent constitution hereditarily fits them, a similar position may, with infinitely better reason, be maintained regarding man and his companion. I have contemplated the destinies so cruelly distorted from the lot of women, of — pardon me for coupling the names — an aristocrat and a plebeian, both of whom I knew; and I found that the feminine nature triumphed in them over every obstacle: amid blood and crime, in sorrow and desolation, through good report or evil, under ridicule,

insult, contumely, shame, and the world's hatred, in turmoil or in quiet, with the advantage of instruction or in the mire of ignorance, — nay, even while subject severally each in her way, to a self-sought perversion of their nature, there was the woman in them, fulfilling her mission of love and mercy. Purposeless! think of the blessings showered on you *yonder*, from the hall to the hamlet!—think on the benefits you have strewn around you!—think on myself that owe to you that fortune in the very effort to attain which for me you made so many happy!

“I cannot write eloquently, but only earnestly. Another would not therefore be persuaded by my argument. You, who know me, will do more.—You will acknowledge its truth.

“But I must hasten to conclude; — we are about to take our last glimpse of Osterœ, and here our convoy vessel leaves us, by which, waiting to the last, I send this. — I hear the men mustering on deck to give the farewell cheers, and with their echo will this letter go, to bid you still remember the warm heart that beats to bless you, amid the ice of an arctic desert.

“Your friend,

“JOHN MERRICK.”

It was late when Brigitta, receiving no order from her mistress as to her retirement for the night, ventured at last to address her. Madame de Malguet had sat still in the wicker chair she occupied, reading Merrick's letter, or musing over it for hours. When the Calabrese spoke, her mistress rose, and with her accustomed determination gave orders in reply for resuming her journey on the morrow. The listless indifference of manner was gone; the leaden look of woe had departed; and such an expression of content and calmness beamed in the eye and mantled on the faded cheek, as her faithful humble friend had not seen there for many months. She spoke, too, no longer with the sort of repugnant utterance of one wearied with the sound of her own voice, but decisively and like herself.

"We will travel humbly, Brigitta: the kind old man who brought this letter will see to get us some conveyance, till we reach Orleans ——"

"And thence, 'Celenza?'"

"Thence we will go by the diligence, not too far at a time, but resting here and there."

"Whither, 'Celenza?'"

"To Italy again, my girl; it may be we must labour once more, for what remains of my own money will not enable me to support us both as I

would wish. We may have a long pilgrimage yet, and we must be provident. — Do you feel grieved at going back to work again?”

“Grieved! ’Celenza, when I see you bearing sorrow and reverses like the blessed Ursula herself!”

“She was an English saint, Brigitta, was she not?” said Madame de Malguet with a sort of smile.

“She was, indeed, ’Celenza, like the Captain.”

“They shall both be my models of endurance,” was the answer spoken half-aloud. “If Josse secures any conveyance for us, wake me before sunrise; and so good night.”

The vehicle stood at the humble door at early dawn; but she for whom it was prepared had travelled in the night another journey. Brigitta found her as one sleeping, with the letter clasped firmly in the dead right hand.

It was thus they buried her, those two faithful ones; and parting at the grave of her they loved, went each their way; Brigitta, fulfilling as a sacred thing the bidding of the dead; the steward faring sadly back, with the tidings that should loose the fountains of a world of tears, to La Chalaudre.

POSTSCRIPT.

WHOSO tells tales of twenty years ago, is bound to chronicle the fate and fortunes of those that figure in his story and outlive its close. Such is the custom, whether the reader care to know or not.

Thus, let him fancy, if he chooses, Merrick returned, and knighted for his services; his notice craved, and his authority quoted; his claims to distinction owned without a caviller daring to gainsay them, and his abilities constantly taxed and tried in every scheme of adventurous survey or perilous exploration, which, for a succession of years, was devised by the English government. He died, wept and honoured, on service on the coast of China.

For the dragoon, he, guided by the acute penetration and cautious foresight of old Finot, so managed as to keep well with the reigning family, yet not too well; so that in 1830 he took a leading part in mitigating the violence of revolutionary fury, mediating between the soldiery and the people, who, both honoured and respected him. He rose high in the army, and died as he would have wished, at the siege of Constantine in Algeria, his eldest son, Jean François, succeeding him.

Annechet married again; she could afford it, for the old gunsmith, Grivet, made, strange to say, a fortune by his patent lock, and left it to his comrade's widow.

La Fosse and Picotot are said to be alive to this day. Eugene is living too, and Adolphe Finot, and their wives; the medlar-bred Lucrèce having, I rejoice to say, exhibited a taste for hussar officers, which makes Adolphe, who has turned miser, miserable, at the length of her milliner's bills.

Madame de Malguet's residue of fortune provided for Brigitta, who retired to her home; and Josse with the rest have, for the most part, shuffled off this mortal coil in peace.

These are gone, and lie buried in the realms of fancy; whence created, they came, like mortal beings, to help in teaching truth awhile, and die.

THE END.

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